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**A STUDY OF THE USE OF ORGANISATIONAL THEATRE:  
THE CASE OF FORUM THEATRE**

**Janet Elizabeth Rae**

**ABSTRACT**

The use of theatre- and drama-based techniques in organisations for supporting learning, development and change in organisations has been a growing phenomenon over the past fifteen years. However, there has been limited empirical research into the process and effectiveness of such interventions. The starting point for this research was exploring organisational theatre - an umbrella term to cover any organisational intervention which involves the use of theatre and drama. The review of the literature led to some preliminary questions concerning the nature and form of organisational theatre and established forum theatre as the focus of this research. There were a number of reasons as to why this was an appropriate focus, including the extent to which its 'political' origins translate to the organisational setting, the potential tensions within its delivery and the resource-intensive nature of the activity.

Through undertaking qualitative interviews with key stakeholders (consultancies, actors and facilitators, commissioners and participants) the research explores the different perspectives of forum theatre, how it is constructed, what are the espoused aims and objectives and what is the actual impact on participants. The research highlights tensions between the 'ideal' of forum theatre interventions, which aims to provide more participatory learning experiences and achieve participant-led learning and change, how commissioners and practitioners construct and implement such interventions, and how forum theatre approaches are experienced by participants.

Overall, I conclude that while forum theatre has the potential to provide a valuable learning experience, unless the tensions are fully acknowledged and addressed, it will not achieve the changes that commissioners look for. Furthermore, there is a need for greater understanding by commissioners of the purpose and potential uses of forum theatre, clarification of the role of the facilitators (who often perform a dual role as actors), more innovative approaches to evaluation and the need for follow-up activities to be an integral part of such events.

**THESIS TITLE**

**A STUDY OF THE USE OF ORGANISATIONAL THEATRE:  
THE CASE OF FORUM THEATRE**

Submitted by

**Janet Elizabeth Rae**

For the degree of

**Doctorate in Business Administration**

Durham Business School

**Durham University 2011**

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my supervisors **Professor Timothy Clark** and **Professor David Greatbatch** for their ongoing encouragement, guidance and advice without which this thesis would not have been possible.

Thanks to colleagues, friends and my drama 'community' for their on-going support and interest.

A special thanks to Sheila Hakim for her transcription and proof-reading skills.

# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCING ORGANISATIONAL THEATRE

### Two Events

It is 10.00a.m. on a weekday at a small theatre in southern England and I am about to take part in a piece of what has been termed 'Forum Theatre' by the organisers. This is a one-day event, and has been designed for two different audiences. Firstly the local council who are the commissioners of the event and whose departments have sent staff from the full range of council departments. Secondly, invitations have been sent to local organisations inviting staff to come and see the event – the promotional literature states that the event is designed as a way of 'helping explore organisational issues' and 'provides an exciting, non-threatening and safe environment for people to learn'. The day has been advertised as a 'taster' day for local organisations to come and see whether or not they would like to use this approach in their own training, and I have been asked to assess the day for potential use by my organisation.

The day starts with a brief introduction about the nature of the day by the facilitator. He places emphasis on the fact that although there is no requirement for any of the delegates to be actors this is a highly participative event. He goes on to say the day is all about exploring diversity, with the emphasis on exploration rather than providing answers or solutions.

The session starts with a drama that introduces the audience to a number of issues which are explored through the relationships that develop between the characters and through monologues presented to the audience by the actors on how they perceive the situations. It is well written and engaging and in the break that follows appears to have generated a considerable amount of initial discussion by the participants.

After the break the actors take part in a 'hot-seating' exercise, in which the cast stay in character and are asked questions by the audience. Hot-seating is a rehearsal technique used to get actors to think more deeply about their characters and a method of accessing the sub-text of dramas – here it is used to enable the audience to examine the underlying motivations of the characters and understand their perspectives. It also offers the first opportunity of the day for the audience to participate by discussing with both the actors and other audience members the issues raised by the play.

The afternoon is signposted by the facilitator as being a piece of forum theatre; it is described by the facilitator as an interactive participatory experience, although it is emphasised again that the delegates (or audience) are not required to be 'actors'. Three of the actors from the morning act out a pre-written scene (although I later learnt that to some extent the scene was improvised). After a few minutes the audience are asked to 'direct' the unfolding scene, which involves a conflict of views, that

is, tell the actors what they think they should say next. The audience are split into three groups of about 20 and allocated an actor each to direct. There are four or five breaks in which each actor comes back for further direction as the play unfolds. Two further sessions follow introducing different scenarios and, in all cases, each group is given a cast member to direct, and through discussion with their group, give their actor lines to develop the story or narrative towards a desired outcome.

The final session is a group discussion, reflecting on the day, and the actions we might take on returning to our workplaces. A few participants make comments and the facilitator draws out some final learning points before closing the day.

This was my first experience of 'organisational theatre' in the form of forum theatre. I was aware of the concept of forum theatre and knew about Augusto Boal's work, but had not encountered it in the organisational context. While I enjoyed the day, as an observer as well as a participant, I did have some concerns. While the dramas brought to life the realities of day-to-day working life - for example, a reluctance to challenge colleagues for fear of making working relationships difficult; the need for a supportive culture in which these issues can be aired – the focus remained on the individual behaviours rather than underlying issues.

Some time earlier I had attended one of Richard Olivier's early leadership workshops, which used Shakespeare's Henry V as a method of exploring leadership issues. I loved the day – I was very familiar with Henry V and was also engaged by the energy and charisma of Richard Olivier (after all he is Laurence Olivier's son) and the interactive nature of the event. The event stayed with me as a fascinating methodology, but when I reflected on it I wondered how much of this was due to the leadership of the workshop and how much was due to the content. In the past I had used plays in my lectures to illustrate points (for example, using *Antigone* as a vehicle to explore ethical issues) but remember struggling with students who had not read the play or were unfamiliar with the story. The workshop was attended by over a 100 delegates, many of them, I suspect, had not encountered or read Henry V prior to that day, and I wondered if firstly the experience would prompt them to read or watch a production of Henry V and secondly whether the development potential might be hindered by unfamiliarity with the main vehicle for such development.

## **Building on Experience**

It was these reservations that prompted my interest in researching this further. I had studied drama for my first degree and worked in professional theatre, and was reluctant to reject the idea that theatre could work as a vehicle for change. I am a regular theatre-goer and participate in, and direct, theatre workshops and productions. I am fascinated by rehearsal processes and the way in which theatre games and drama workshops can enable a group of people, some of whom may never have performed before, develop in a short period of time into a high performing team willing to expose their skills to a paying audience. I was therefore very receptive to the use of theatre as a method for learning,

development and change and my initial question was whether or not theatre-based interventions of this nature could produce the same stimulus and outcomes in an organisational setting.

I began to read articles in the practitioner journals which provided glowing accounts of the use of theatre-based interventions (see Arkin 2005; Caulkin 2000; Pickard 2000); turning to the academic literature I encountered the more analytical perspectives, notably the 2004 Special Edition of *Organisational Studies*. However, rigorous critiques appeared to be lacking with the exception of Clark and Mangham (2004a) and Meisiek and Barry (2007). Thus while organisational theatre activities have generated considerable interest in the management and HR practitioner journals (Ferris 2002; Arkin 2005) and there has been a growing body of academic literature concerning the concept, design and process of organisational theatre, there has been little research into the actual practice and impact of these activities (Clark 2008). Furthermore much of this research has been initiated in Northern Europe and the USA; given the theatrical traditions within the UK and the seemingly growing number of providers it is perhaps surprising that little research has taken place here. A review of the terminology shows a breadth of activity involving theatre-based techniques, ranging from rehearsal derived workshop activities to full performances, but overall, the literature in this field appears to be rather fragmented, possibly caused by a variation in approaches among different cultures and nationalities.

While the organisational studies literature provided insights into the use of theatre and drama within organisational settings, the studies with a few notable exceptions, failed to draw on people's actual experience, be they practitioners, commissioners or participants. Furthermore, while the commentaries drew to some extent on, for example, the role of the actor or the nature of theatre there appeared to be little reference to drama or performance studies literature or practice. Where theatre and performance studies were invoked there was a tendency to focus primarily on the work of Bertholt Brecht, and Augusto Boal, both of whom have a distinct approach to the practice of theatre, with limited consideration of current theatre and performance studies literature.

Thus the area of organisational theatre seemed a fruitful area for exploration and combined my work and non-work interests. My on-going exposure to professional and non-professional theatre gave me some initial understanding of what organisational theatre providers might be trying to achieve, and I was interested in the idea of how fairly specialised, if not potentially elite, processes could be transferred to an organisational setting.

## **The Scope of the Research**

Clark (2008) provides a comprehensive summary and review of the current state of organisational theatre and notes that given that this is an expanding activity 'the area offers fertile opportunity for researchers to make a number of significant insights' (p.405). In particular he suggests that how and why theatre is used in organisations is an underdeveloped field of research and poses a number of

questions, including that of distinctiveness and the nature of the development and delivery of the performances. Clark also notes that of the empirical work that exists, it is primarily based on single case studies - that is an exploration of one specific performance or event (see Clark and Mangham 2004a; Clark and Mangham 2004b; Gibb 2004; Meisiek and Barry 2007; Taylor 2008) - and recommends greater use of performance and theatre studies literature to support analysis. Thus this research aims to build on the analysis and empirical research done to date in two ways; firstly by making greater use of the theatre and performance studies literature; secondly by using the existing studies to inform the approach but broadening the scope by exploring a wider range and number of events and comparing and contrasting the perspectives of all the stakeholders.

My initial reading of the literature indicated that there appears to be an underlying assumption that merely through being exposed to theatrical activities, participants would become more effective in some, often unspecified, way, when returning to their organisational role. While the participants may receive theatre-based interventions enthusiastically, the ability of providers to develop its full potential is likely to be mediated by a number of contextual and processual factors. Thus while there is much anecdotal evidence of the short-term impact of these approaches, much of the writing on these trends, notably in the practitioner literature, are commentaries rather than analysis. Thus my starting point became a desire to investigate these claims in more detail. To what extent did the 'rhetoric' of the practitioners and some of the commentators match the reality of the participants? On what basis did organisations commission these events? How did the professional providers justify such interventions and did they meet the expectations of the providers? Taking the playwright David Hare's (1991) comment that real plays 'show us that feelings which we had thought private turn out to be common ground, and uniquely they appeal as much to our minds as to our hearts' (p.46), to what extent are commissioning organisations willing to pay for learning and development events which appeal in this way, if indeed they do?

The starting point for my research was an exploration of all forms of theatre-based interventions, of which organisational theatre is sometimes defined as one aspect, and sometimes appears as an umbrella term to cover any organisational intervention which involves the use of theatre. The review of the literature led to some preliminary questions concerning the nature and form of organisational theatre and established forum theatre as the focus of this research. There were a number of reasons as to why this seemed to be an appropriate focus, including the extent to which its 'political' origins translate to the organisational setting, the potential tensions within its delivery and the resource-intensive nature of the activity.

Clark (2008) critiques the current research output to date as being only 'a partial picture of the different kinds of agents involved in this activity' (p.405) and argues for a need to broaden the understanding. As noted previously, one of his key criticisms is that there has been an overly micro approach to date, examining individual case studies rather than providing a more macro overview. This study aims to address some of these issues, by drawing on data from a range of companies, which

will compare and contrast different approaches and draw on perspectives from all stakeholders in the process with the aim of developing an understanding of what aspects of such interventions have the greater impact. Given that there appears to be an increasing market for such activities and given the resource intensity of such events for organisations and providers it is hoped that such a study will enable providers and commissioners to develop a greater understanding of the efficacy of such events.

## **Overview of Thesis**

The first chapter in the literature review outlines the context of the research by providing an overview of the origins and growth of organisational theatre, setting it within the wider context of both theatre and performance studies and applied and educational theatre literature. The second chapter explores the nature and purpose of organisational theatre, drawing on both the practitioner and academic literature to explore the methods currently in use and the espoused purposes of such interventions. Drawing on both the performance and organisational studies literature, a typology of organisational theatre is developed, introducing forum theatre as a one specific type of organisational theatre. The third chapter of the review explores the form and processes of forum theatre, paying particular attention to the development of learning spaces, the use of dramatic representation and the nature of audience participation. It considers the use of mental models (Argyris and Schon 1991) and second-order observation (Clark 2008; Meisiek 2004; Schreyögg 2001) as a method of exploring the impact on participants and provides a discussion about evaluating and assessing the impact of forum theatre events.

The first part of chapter five provides a brief summary of questions arising from the literature review, which informs the research aims and objectives. The overall aim of the research is articulated as *'to compare the espoused theory of theatre-based interventions versus the theory-in-use and to establish the extent to which the providers', commissioners' and participants' perspectives (concerning purpose, processes and outcomes) are in alignment'*; this is underpinned by the following research objectives:

1. To explore how forum theatre is used in organisations and what are the espoused aims and objectives of the different approaches from the perspectives of the stakeholders (providers, participants and commissioners);
2. To identify the components of forum theatre and ascertain the extent to which the process (or components of the process) support or hinder the perceived purpose from the perspective of the stakeholders;
3. To explore the impact of forum theatre from the perspective of the stakeholders.

The second part of the chapter five outlines the approach taken in relation to designing and carrying out the research. It briefly outlines the epistemological and ontological considerations which informed the



research design, and provides a justification for the use of qualitative data collection and semi-structured interviews. It then provides a practical account of the data collection process, including preparation and carrying out the interviews and observations which form the main part of the data collection. The data analysis process is discussed and examples of how the themes emerged from the data are provided together with a critical reflection of the process.

Chapter six, *Forum Theatre in the Organisational Context*, explores how forum theatre is constructed and defined by the project managers and commissioners, and these constructions are compared and contrasted with applied theatre approaches, including the work of Augusto Boal. The chapter also explores the purpose, distinctiveness and value of forum theatre from the perspective of the practitioners and commissioners.

Chapter seven, *The Practice of Forum Theatre*, explores the processes involved during the interventions including the development and management of learning spaces, which in turn impacts on the degree of audience participation and the nature of the discussions. The level and type of participation is mediated by the degree of control maintained by the actors/facilitators and raises the issue of role ambiguity in relation to as to the extent to which their perspectives are aligned with both the project managers and commissioners. This chapter also considers how the expectations of the client and consultancy developed during the commissioning process have the potential for the facilitator/actors, who are responding to the live audience, to be subject to contradictory and potentially conflicting expectations and pressures.

Chapter eight, *Impact and Outcomes*, explores the after-effects of forum theatre; it discusses the problems that commissioners and project managers encounter in undertaking evaluation, often taking a functionalist perspective, and through a consideration of how participants experience forum theatre, suggests that alternative methods of evaluation need to be considered.

Chapter nine, *Towards an Understanding of Forum Theatre*, draws together the main themes arising from the analysis and considers the findings in the light of the previous literature and the research objectives. It highlights the key issues arising from the delivery of forum theatre in organisational contexts, offers a consideration of the findings' implications for theory and practice and provides suggestions for future research.

## CHAPTER 2

# THE THEATRICAL FORM : FRAMING ORGANISATIONAL THEATRE

### Introduction

Put at its simplest, organisational theatre describes the use of theatre-based practices within an organisation, played out to a defined audience (normally employees) with the aim of bringing about some sort of change at either an organisational or individual level. A review of the organisational and performance studies literature shows that the use of theatre in organisations developed from two separate streams - firstly from a theoretical perspective, the use of theatre as a vehicle for organisational analysis, and, secondly from the move of theatre performances from mainstream theatre institutions to community settings and, eventually, organisations. This first chapter of the literature review provides a brief overview of the way in which theatre has framed organisational analysis, before providing a performance-based context for organisational theatre, namely applied and educational theatre.

### Dramatism, Dramaturgy and Metaphor : An Overview

There has been 'a long tradition of using artistic forms as a metaphor for organizations and/or activity within organizations' (Taylor and Hansen 2004 p.1218) and while the use of theatre in organisational settings is relatively recent, the relationship between theatre and organisation studies dates back much further, with theatre and drama being used as a method or tool for organisational analysis. 'The language, techniques, and metaphors of theatre have inspired a growing body of organizational research' (Meisiek 2004 p.817), and early explorations of organisational theatre in its various forms situate it primarily within the organisational studies literature, with particular reference to the dramaturgical and theatrical metaphor (see Clark and Mangham 2004b; Nissley et al. 2004; Schreyögg and Hopfl 2004).

Theatre entered the field of organisational studies initially through the analytical perspectives of dramatism (Burke 1945), which treats life as if it was theatre, and dramaturgy (Goffman 1959), which holds the view that life can be considered as being like theatre (Clark and Mangham 2004b). Burke's work appears to be both highly influential and underused (Mangham and Overington 1983) partially due to the obscure and 'baroque language' that is employed in the original work (Clark and Mangham (2004b). A limited number of studies have drawn on Burke's method to analyse aspects of

organisational life (for example Czarniaswska-Joerges and Jacobson 1995; Graham-Hill and Grimes 1995; Mangham and Overington 1983; Walter and Manon 2001) but the organisational theatre literature (see Clark and Mangham 2004b; Nissley et al 2004; Meisiek 2007) does not, on the whole, go beyond acknowledging Burke's influence on the use of theatre in organisational studies.

While Burke saw life as theatre, Goffman (1959) employed an alternative perspective, using the dramaturgical framework as a method for analysing social life and social interactions. Thus Goffman (1959) applied the language of theatre to describing social actions as a series of performances, making the invisible visible, and highlighting the importance of cohesion and coherence in such performances. Such performances take place in 'settings' which need to be congruent in order to provide the right impression so that the signs and symbols of the performance evoke the appropriate message. Goffman's concern is with the structure of social encounters and the way in which using the language of performance to analyse the behaviour of individuals offers organisational analysts a framework for examining 'the fleeting and episodic face-to-face interaction that constitutes a large part of social and organisational life' (Clark and Mangham 2004b p.40). While Goffman's work has been critiqued on a number of grounds that the model does not go beyond role performance, identity and impression management his writings have a resonance with some theatre practitioners, notably the actor and playwright Alan Bennett, whose own plays are based on such minute observations.

As with all the best books I took Goffman's work to somehow be a secret between me and the author ... individuals knew they behaved this way, but Goffman knew everyone behaved this way, and so did I (1997 p.476).

While the concepts of dramatism and dramaturgy can be clearly delineated in terms of life is theatre and life is like theatre, nevertheless more recently discussions have tended to link the concepts more explicitly. An examination of the dramaturgical metaphor has highlighted the influence of Burke, Goffman and Mangham and Overington on the development of understanding the way that the theatrical turn impacts on everyday life (Clark 2008). Clark argues that the focus on the dramaturgical metaphor has resulted in 'a general failure to realise that life is not like theatre, life is theatre [and that] life and indeed organisations have taken an increasingly performative turn' (p.402).

Not only have organisations been subject to the 'performative turn' (Clark 2008 p.402) but activities within organisations, specifically the growth in the literature on exploring management as art, rather than science (see Mangham 1990; Vaill 1989). In turn, this has led to an interest in how and what management can learn from the arts (Nissley et al. 2004; Taylor and Hansen 2005). Thus in the last ten to fifteen years, there has been an abundance of literature, primarily, but not exclusively from the practitioner market, providing lessons for management from, mainly, Shakespeare's plays (see Augustine and Adelman 1999; Corrigan, 1999; Whitney and Packer, 2000), which in turn has led to arts and theatre practitioners, such as Richard Olivier, whose work was referenced in chapter one, bringing arts and theatre into organisations to support learning, development and change. In what

could be considered a relatively short space of time, theatre has moved from being a vehicle to analyse social and organisational life, to an instructional or developmental methodology employed by organisations. Thus, 'organization theatre ... offers a perspective on organizations and theatre that plays with the notions of Burke and Goffman. Countering theatre with theatre, it is the conscious use of theatrical techniques in organizations...' (Meisiek 2007 p.174).

The dramaturgical and metaphorical approaches to organisational analysis offer a bridge between theatre as a metaphor and theatre in action by providing both a conceptual framework for organisational analysis, as well as being used to frame the use of theatre as a methodology to stimulate learning and change from a community perspective. Thus the next section considers the nature of theatre and the ways in which theatre has been developed, to be used not only for entertainment, but also for education and development, taking theatre from the playhouse into community and social settings (Ackroyd 2000, 2007; Nicholson 2005).

## **The Nature of Theatre**

The art of theatre is an expression of humanness; it is an art that can never dissolve its reliance on the scale of the human figure, the sound of the human voice and the disposition of mankind to tell each other stories (Eyre and Wright 2001 p.10)

Theatre is based on the dual appeal of co-existing functions - the traditional communicating of a story carried out with 'signs that aim at imparting information ... and seeks to please or amaze an audience ... with the stress on the direct physical experience of the event' (Carlson 1996 p.81) and this duality is a key theme in theatre studies literature – the telling of a story which aims to entertain, which is enacted live, enabling the audience to be part of the event. However, it is also suggested that the purpose of theatre goes beyond entertainment, and, as Mangham (2001) notes, 'over the years ... theatre has been regarded as a particularly powerful space for challenge, reflection and instruction' (p.296). It is this perspective which drives the consideration of ways in which theatre has been used in different contexts - while Nissley et al. (2004) comment that theatre has been 'colonized' by organisations, applying theatre to different contexts is not a new phenomenon; over the centuries, theatre has continually reinvented itself in order to survive (Ackroyd 2000; Hodgson 1972). Employing theatre as a way of educating, informing or raising awareness cannot be described as a new or recent use.

While Clark and Mangham (2004b) argue that the use of theatre within organisations is tacitly rooted in 'a coherent set of ideas concerning the function of theatre' (p.41), it cannot be said that there is one single purpose of theatre, whether situated in 'traditional' theatre institutions or located elsewhere. How theatre is used varies from culture to culture, and generation to generation and its purpose therefore may be located in a particular time and context. Furthermore there is ongoing debate around

the tension between what has been termed aesthetic theatre (Schechner 2002; Jackson 2007), where the 'artistic effect and entertainment are the principle function' (Jackson 2007 p.2) and social' theatre which 'claims a social, interventionist purpose in the world' (Schechner and Thompson 2004 p.2). To some extent, this is a false dichotomy as, while it is one that has been widely accepted in the performance studies literature for the purposes of highlighting different forms of theatrical practice, it is, as Jackson (2007) notes, 'also problematical as it appears to suggest that social and aesthetic functions cannot be equally at work in the same performance, at the same moment' (p.2).

One specific example of theatre which aims to be both aesthetic and instrumental, and is frequently referenced in relation to organisational theatre, is Bertolt Brecht's 'epic theatre', the realisation of his proposition that art and education are not mutually exclusive. In his early years Brecht considered the purpose of this work was 'to develop the art of consumption into a teaching aid and to refashion certain institutions from places of entertainment into organs of information' (Esslin 1983 p.116). While Brecht modified this view in later life, it nevertheless permeates his work; through both his writing and directing Brecht therefore aimed to 'alienate' or 'distance' the audience from the action (creating the '*Verfremdungseffekt*'<sup>1</sup>) which in turn would lead the audience to think, rather than feel and be discouraged from identifying with the characters.

Brecht's approach has been contrasted with the theatre of Aristotle (Esslin 1983) which demands the 'identification' of the spectators with the play; Brecht argued that through identification with the characters, the meaning of the performances become obscured; by showing theatre as it is, with, for instance, lighting and staging displayed rather than hidden, the spectators will stand back and judge the meaning for themselves. Brechtian theatre is thus an approach which aims to 'arouse indignation in the audience, dissatisfaction, a realization of contradictions' (Esslin 1983 p.133).

However theatre audiences have struggled with the notion of disengagement and alienation and, as Esslin (1983) suggests, Brecht's success as a playwright lies in his partial failure to realise his intentions. For example, *Mother Courage* and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* both depict heroines facing adversity, and it is not difficult when watching a production of either these plays to be drawn in to the protagonists' worlds and empathise with their predicaments. Nevertheless, there is no doubt about the influential nature of Brecht's work and his intention to use theatre as a method of enabling his audiences to reflect on contradictions in society, and to consider how that society might be changed, resonates with later uses of theatre in educational and community settings. However, it can also be argued that the 'partial failure' supports the concerns that 'when art is used to teach either the teaching or the art must suffer' (Levy 1987 cited in Jackson 2007 p.25).

Nevertheless Brecht's purpose 'to put the audience in a better position to understand the world around them' (Barthes 1972 cited in Fortier 1996 p.29) finds a resonance with current 'political' playwrights,

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<sup>1</sup> As Esslin (1983) notes this term does not have a literal meaning in English – the nearest translations, alienation or estrangement, comes loaded with emotional overtones. Esslin suggests that the French translation 'distantiation' would be a more accurate term.

for example David Hare, whose trilogy of plays, depicting the state of three different UK institutions, aimed to demonstrate the preoccupations, tensions and conflicts within the church (*Racing Demon*), the judiciary (*Murmuring Judges*) and the government (*Absence of War*). While the meaning of ‘political’ theatre is by no means clear-cut, nevertheless, there is a view among British theatre commentators that whereas political theatre ‘once entailed counter-cultural dispute, it is now part of the mainstream [and] in its many different forms, has come of age’ (Coveney 2004).

Thus from Shakespeare to Schiller, Brecht to Hare, theatre has been used to question the status quo, hold a mirror up to society, and ‘provide models for the ways in which societies behave’ (Shepherd and Wallis 2004 p.1). As the Guardian theatre critic, Michael Billington (2009) comments, on reviewing David Hare’s *The Power of Yes*, ‘[the play] proves yet again that theatre has the capacity to instruct delightfully, and to make sense of the world’ ([www.guardian.co.uk/stage](http://www.guardian.co.uk/stage)). However, while the playwright Arthur Miller (1987) comments ‘art ought to be of use in changing society...’ (p.93), the extent to which theatre can and does theatre change society is an issue that has provoked much debate and discussion. Furthermore, as Jackson (2007) notes, if the purpose of theatre (or art) is to ‘remove us from the mundane so that we reconnect with our inner selves or with larger matters to do with human purpose, spirituality’ (p.5) when theatre is used to teach or instruct there is the potential for the aesthetic purpose to be ‘damaged or compromised’ (ibid). This is a recurring theme throughout the literature review – does taking theatre into organisations for specific purposes damage or compromise the nature of the theatrical event? However, one theatre practitioner, Augusto Boal, set out specifically to change society through the use of theatre, and his work has had a significant influence on the growth and development of applied, educational and organisational theatre, that is theatre which takes place outside what might be termed traditional theatre institutions.

## **The Legacy of Augusto Boal**

Any discussion around theatre in alternative or community settings will reference the Brazilian theatre director Augusto Boal, viewed as one of the most influential of contemporary theatre practitioners (Babbage 2004; Jackson 2007; Milling and Ley 2001; Nicholson 2005). Furthermore, many of the debates on organisational theatre reference his work, and Boal’s model of forum theatre, in theory at least, underpins much of the theatre-based work in communities and organisations.

The practice of forum theatre developed through Boal’s work as a director in San Paulo, in the 1960s where he was presenting theatre ‘for and about the oppressed’ (Babbage 2004 p.21) and a method was developed by which ‘ownership’ of the theatre process could be transferred from the actors / directors to the audience or spec-actors through enabling communication in a range of languages – artistic as well as linguistic – ‘without hierarchising one above another, and respecting the knowledge that participants already had’ (ibid p.20).

Boal founded his ideas on the belief that all theatre is necessarily political. The term ‘political theatre’ is a familiar one in the UK theatre, generally defined as theatre that challenges or provides an alternative perspective on what might be termed ‘The Establishment’. In Boal’s terms political is not a ‘specific position or set of attitudes but the fact of connectedness to the system by which a society is organized and governed’ (Babbage p.39) – thus by this definition all theatre is political and both ‘reflects and affects the way that society is organized through its dynamic engagement with the value systems underpinning it’ (ibid p.40). Thus in Boal’s terms, theatre is a weapon, with two fundamental principles – ‘to help the spect-actor transform himself into a protagonist of the dramatic action and rehearse alternatives for this situation so that he may then be able to extrapolate into his real life the actions he has rehearsed in the practice of theatre’ (Boal 1995 p.40).

Key to Boal’s work is the role of the spect-actor in the process. Initially Boal’s work was concerned with presenting performances with the chief aim of raising consciousness as part of a programme to ‘develop popular audiences among the disempowered members sectors of the population’ (Babbage 2004 p.17). However Boal (1995) himself expresses the tensions in this approach:

It seemed right to us, indeed a matter of great urgency, to exhort the oppressed to struggle against oppression ... And we made use of our Art to tell Truths, to bring solutions, We taught the peasants how to fight for their lands – we who lived in the big cities. We taught the blacks how to combat racial prejudice – we who are almost very, very white. We taught women how to struggle against their oppressors. Which oppressors? Why, us, since we were feminists to a man – and virtually all of us were men (p.1).

This reflection led Boal to find alternative methods of giving ‘the oppressed’ a voice through the medium of theatre. Thus forum theatre was developed as a vehicle to change society’s inequalities through which inherent power structures and inequalities could be challenged and changed (Babbage 2004; Nissley et al. 2004). With this in mind, Boal looked to provide different structures which could be adapted according to the groups he was working with – while such structures emphasised participation by the audience or spect-actors as they were later described, the different forms involved different levels of participation (Babbage 2004). The two methods that have most relevance to this research are *Simultaneous Dramaturgy* and *Forum Theatre*. Both methods used professional actors to develop a narrative through asking participants to tell a story containing a political or social problem which has a difficult solution; Simultaneous dramaturgy then asks the spectators to call out suggestions for changing the action which are then improvised by the actors. In forum theatre, the spectators take over from the actors and perform their own suggestions. The latter model is described in some detail below:

‘a ... skit portraying that problem and the solution intended for discussion is improvised or rehearsed [by the actors] and subsequently presented. When the skit is over the participants are if they agree with the solution presented. At least some will say no. At this point it is

explained that the scene will be performed once more exactly as it was the first time. But now any participant has the right to replace any actor and lead the action in the direction that seems to him to be most appropriate ... the other actors have to face the newly created situation, responding instantly to all the possibilities that might be present' (Boal 1979 p.139).

The process is moderated by the joker or 'difficultator' (a term used to highlight the complexities of a given situation, rather than simplifying it) who works with the participants/spect-actors to work through the issues and develop their own solutions. Through forum theatre in particular, Boal used theatre as a method of enabling participants to be just that – real participants enacting real issues which would lead to a discovery of their own solutions (Babbage 2004; Nissley et al. 2004), placing the emphasis on action rather than talk.

Boal's model of forum theatre has had a lasting influence on theatre-based activity in community and educational settings, and the final section of this chapter explores applied and educational theatre methodologies, both of which draw significantly on the techniques and principles of Augusto Boal's work (Babbage 2004; Nicholson 2005; Jackson 2007).

## **Applied and Educational Theatre**

Applied theatre draws on three specific UK theatre strands - the political, alternative and radical theatre movement starting in the 1920s; drama and theatre in education (DIE/TIE) and community theatre (Nicholson 2005). All of these strands involve theatre being performed within 'clearly defined contexts with and for specific audiences and in furthering objectives which are not only artistic, but educational, social, and political' (Nicholson 2005 p.2). Thus the term applied theatre suggests an educative purpose with the intention to bring about some type of beneficial change within a defined community.

While to some extent the term applied theatre is used to promote or describe theatre activities within marginalised or displaced communities (for example prisons, conflict zones), Ackroyd (2000; 2007) takes a wider perspective and argues that applied theatre should be viewed as encompassing a range of activities within different communities, not necessarily those that might be called marginalised or displaced.

... one group uses theatre to promote positive social processes within a particular community, whilst others employ it in order to promote an understanding of human resource issues among corporate employees. The intentions of the course vary. They could be used to inform, to cleanse, to unify, to instruct, to raise awareness (2000 p.1).



Jackson (2007) uses the term 'educational theatre' synonymously with applied theatre – similarly this term incorporates (but not exclusively) theatre-in-education and theatre for development, but like applied theatre has a similar intent, namely:

... to signify forms of theatre practice that aim to effect a transformation in people's lives, whether that be the activation of a process of attitudinal or behavioural change on the part of the audience or the creation or consolidation of consciousness about the audience's place in the world, or, more modestly, the triggering of curiosity about a specific issue (p.1).

Thus, applied and educational theatre<sup>2</sup> specifically aim to go beyond simply informing or instructing, to instigating some type of change within the audience. Embedded within the practice of applied/educational theatre is the explicit (rather than implicit) aim of education, the intentionality of 'using the power of theatre to address something beyond the form itself' (Ackroyd 2000). As with the Boalian model, the central technique is audience participation (Ackroyd 2000; Babbage 2004; Nicholson 2005) a technique which aims to support the 'twin convictions that human behaviour and institutions are formed through social activities and can therefore be changed and that audiences as potential agents of change should be active participants in their own learning' (Vine 1993 p.110). The approaches cited here have subsequently informed the development of organisational theatre – thus methods which began in educational and community settings, particularly marginalised communities, have made their way into theatre-based interventions in organisations and the degree to which this has been a successful transition forms the basis of this research.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this chapter was to provide an overview of the antecedents of organisational theatre, firstly through a consideration of the use of theatre as a vehicle for organisational analysis and then by exploring the different ways theatre has been used, from entertainment to education. In relation to the latter, the work of Bertholt Brecht and Augusto Boal was specifically referenced, given their approach to theatre as a vehicle for change, at both an individual, community and society, providing a context for theatre moving beyond the confines of the playhouse into the community and, subsequently, organisations.

While the concepts of dramatism and dramaturgy can be delineated in terms of life is theatre and life is like theatre, nevertheless, recent discussions have tended to link the concepts more explicitly. An examination of the dramaturgical metaphor has highlighted the influence of Burke, Goffman and Mangham and Overington on the development of understanding the way that the theatrical turn impacts on everyday life (Clark 2008) and provides an underpinning for the increasing popularity of theatre-

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<sup>2</sup> Given that the features of applied and educational theatre are broadly similar, for the purposes of the ongoing discussion, the term 'applied theatre' will be used throughout this thesis to include educational theatre.

based interventions in organisations. From the academic perspective the interest in the relationship between theatre and organisations has changed; theatre performances within organisations have moved from being used for entertainment to being used for intervention, subsequently attracting academic attention. Consequently in the organisational studies literature, discussion around theatre has moved from the dramatist and dramaturgical perspectives towards an exploration of how theatre is used in organisations (Clark 2008; Clark and Mangham 2004a; Darso 2006; Meisiek 2002; Meisiek and Barry 2007; Nissley et al. 2004).

Thus, organisational theatre cannot be explored in isolation from its antecedents and it is argued that theatre has a tradition of providing not ‘just’ entertainment, but also perspectives on the society and the communities in which we live, and providing ‘a mirror up to nature’. A further intention, moving audiences beyond understanding to action, is exemplified in Brecht’s work, which aimed to ‘arouse indignation in the audience, dissatisfaction’ (Esslin 1983 p.133), such emotions motivating the audience sufficiently to take action once the performance had finished. While these intentions were never fully realised, Brecht’s work has remained influential, and this tradition of educating audiences has continued through to the current day with the recently revived interest by the theatre-going public in what is termed ‘political’ theatre (Coveney 2004), that is, plays which provide a commentary on some aspect of society, aiming to challenge the populist view, or the status quo or to offer an alternative, normally anti-establishment, perspective.

However, it is argued that political theatre usually addresses ‘the converted cognoscenti rather than a popular audience’ (Billington (n.d.) cited in Coveney 2004); furthermore, if political theatre has become mainstream, it is difficult to argue how it might also be anti-establishment, or counter-cultural. Augusto Boal’s offers an alternative model for political theatre, one which sees politics as inextricably linked with power, and it is his model which has had a direct impact on the practice of theatre in educational, community and (now) organisational settings. His work moved theatre out of the playhouse, with the aim of bringing about social change through directly working with communities, not ‘as an instrument of propaganda ... rather as a training ground for action’ (Babbage 2004 p.41). Boal’s approach is mirrored in applied theatre practices, which, like Boal’s work tends to focus on marginalised communities; nevertheless the aim of bringing about change at an individual or community level resonates with much of the organisational theatre literature. Furthermore the techniques of applied theatre, as will be seen in the next chapter, are mirrored in many of the theatre-based interventions taking place within organisations, notably in those interventions labelled as ‘forum theatre’ which will be discussed in more depth in chapter four.

Having explored the antecedents of organisational theatre chapter three explores the nature and form of organisational theatre, examining the different approaches to organisational theatre through an exploration and discussion of typologies of both arts-based interventions in general and organisational theatre in particular.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **THEATRE IN THE ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT**

#### **Introduction**

Having provided an overview of the antecedents of organisational theatre, the second chapter of the literature review specifically discusses the nature and purpose of organisational theatre, initially positioning its development within the applied theatre context.

Organisational theatre is a relatively new area of applied theatre, with the majority of organisational theatre consultancies appearing to start sometime between the late 1980s and early 1990s. Since then there has been a significant increase in the use of theatre and drama in training, development and change management interventions within organisations. It is difficult to find specific figures of the numbers and turnover of some activities - in terms of UK provision, Thrift (2000) estimated that at the time of writing there were approximately 80 companies operating theatre-based interventions; in 2006 Arts & Business UK<sup>3</sup> listed 120 organisations on their website ranging from individual consultants, to small companies employing the majority of their workers on a freelance basis (Pickard 2000), to larger training and organisational development consultancies such as Maynard Leigh, who include drama and theatre-based interventions as part of their portfolio of work.

This chapter explores the nature of organisational theatre, firstly considering its growth and development, before providing an exploration of the form and purpose. This discussion leads to the development of a typology of organisational theatre which draws on both the applied and organisational theatre literature.

#### **Organisational Theatre : Growth and Development**

The reasons for theatre professionals viewing organisations as fruitful places to ply their craft has not been fully articulated; some of the reasons can be attributed to the Conservative (and subsequent) government policy in the mid-1980s to make arts and education subject to market forces. Coupled with recession and soaring inflation, public subsidy for theatre-in-education (TIE) significantly reduced which, coinciding with the devolution of local education authority budgets to individual schools, resulted in the closure of many TIE companies (Jackson 1993, 2007; Kershaw 1992). Thus there was a need for theatre practitioners to seek another outlet for their craft and organisational theatre offered a way for theatre to re-invent itself for a new market.

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<sup>3</sup> A request in 2009 to Arts and Business for an update on these figures received a response that this information was no longer available

From the organisational perspective there is a growing emphasis on the need for organisations to develop creativity, entrepreneurial skills and innovation (Morgan 1988; Coopey 2002; Warren and Gilmore 2004). Alongside this drive is the suggestion that traditional management methods may no longer be appropriate in the current environment - there is increasing belief that rational and logical approaches to problem solving in organisations, which are based on the assumption of a 'stable, knowable and predictable world' (Weick 2007 p.15) are not sustainable and there is a need for a fundamentally different approach to managing organisations. It is suggested that arts-based methods are a way of offering a different approach to managing learning and change, through drawing on presentational knowledge (Heron and Reason 2001) enabling 'direct access to our felt experience and draw up our emotional connection to our self, others and our experience (Taylor and Ladkin 2009 p.56).

Thus, those promoting arts and theatre-based interventions would argue that using the creative industries provides the vehicle for developing organisational capabilities. Indeed Arts and Business (A&B) was set up in the 1980s with the remit to promote links between arts and business, both from encouraging companies to sponsor arts-based activities and to facilitate relationships between arts-based learning providers and organisations. A&B are enthusiastic advocates and promoters of arts and theatre-based training, as instanced by the following taken from their website:

Artists and arts organisations have unique expertise in stimulating and harnessing creativity. It's their stock in trade. They can help your people discover new ways of looking at business challenges, more imaginative ways of solving problems, new capacity for innovation, more fruitful ways of collaborating. They offer an antidote to the lazy or cynical thinking that can impair business performance. And they stimulate the qualities that drive and differentiate successful businesses – passion, honesty, insight, invention and character.... And companies are extending the techniques into new areas, to provide radical alternatives to traditional training. They're using techniques like 'forum theatre' to stimulate employee engagement and debate, generate dialogue between groups and provide a neutral, unthreatening environment ([www.absa.org](http://www.absa.org)).

However, while it is acknowledged that in the current competitive climate that there is a need for encouraging creativity and innovation within organisations, it is more than a sudden discovery of arts-based learning by senior managers that has led to the growth of such activities. Indeed, history indicates a tension between the world of business and the arts world, each one viewing the other with suspicion (Darso 2004; Meisiek and Hatch 2008). But side-by-side with the requirement for increased creativity is the way that 'life is increasingly theatrical and performative in character' (Clark 2008 p.401) which is reflected within the organisational context. Thus, as Clark (2008) notes, 'the technology of theatre', previously used more to manage the outward face of organisations, is increasingly being used within the organisation – 'training is increasingly becoming a performative activity in which participants are being asked to step out of their work roles and adopt another

character in the hope that they become to embody some aspect of this role permanently' (p.403). However, as will be discussed later while performance by employees is one aspect of organisational theatre, there are variations between approaches to organisational theatre consultancies, which impacts both on how such interventions are delivered and how the purpose of such activities is perceived and realised.

## **Defining Organisational Theatre**

An examination of both the practitioner and academic literature would support the view that 'organisational theatre is not one practice but many' (Meisiek and Barry 2007 p.1806); the term incorporates theatre-based training (Nissley et al. 2004); situation drama (Meisiek 2002); forum theatre (Clark and Mangham 2004a; Larsen 2005) which imports its methodology from the work of Boal; theatre of intervention (Schreyögg 2001); industrial or corporate theatre (Clark 2008; Clark and Mangham 2004b; Pineault 1989; Smith 1997); action theatre (Arkin 2005) and, more recently, active-audience theatre (Meisiek and Barry 2007).

Some of these terms are viewed as sub-sets of organisational theatre, and in some cases the terms are used almost interchangeably – forum, situation and active - audience theatre tend to describe a methodology of participative theatre whereby participants are offered a dramatic performance and then in one form or other, the spectators become part of the action, as described in the previous chapter (p.21). At the other end of the audience participation continuum corporate theatre indicates an approach where theatre is used to affirm, support and celebrate organisational success (Clark 2008; Clark and Mangham 2004b; Smith 1997) and provides no opportunity for audience intervention. Given the diversity of terminology it is challenging for commissioners interested in using some form of organisational theatre being clear about what they are purchasing; one of the questions to considered in this research is how do they make sense (if they do) of what is on offer in what is now a highly competitive field?

Organisational theatre interventions aim to 'promote and support change within organisations ... using diverse techniques to create an awareness of problems, to stimulate discussion and foster a readiness for change' (Meisiek 2002a p.4) and to bring about some form of change in behaviour either at an individual or organisational level (Meisiek 2004; Schreyögg 2001). Schreyögg (2001) states that 'organisational theatre can be a powerful medium in organisational change processes. It can open conflicts which are deadlocked or render the undiscussable discussable' through exposing the audience 'to situations of their daily life, thereby confronting it with hidden conflicts, subconscious behavioural patterns or critical routines' (ibid). Coopey (2002) also sees organisational theatre and, specifically, forum theatre as a change management process, 'using the world of theatre as a paradigm for organisational structures and ways of working ... injecting imagination and creativity; engaging hearts and minds'. Both Schreyögg and Coopey emphasise the use of theatre in organisations as a radical form of managing change, offering a disturbing method of jolting individuals out of their complacent

state – ‘the atmosphere is normally tense. There is uneasy silence, laughter and tears. The reactions to this specific experience are usually strong, even in the physical sense with the participants being drenched in sweat’ (Schreyögg 2001). Leaving aside the ethical issues that arise from putting employees through such an experience, given that topics for organisational theatre include communication, diversity, conflict, customer care (Gibb 2004; Meisiek 2002a) it is difficult to envisage, at least on the UK stage, such topics engendering the reactions cited above, however they are presented.

Furthermore, Schreyögg’s description of organisational theatre can be directly contrasted with the A&B description cited previously. Far from offering challenge and disturbance to participants, A&B offer commissioners considering organisational and forum theatre, a ‘neutral and unthreatening’ experience. Thus Hadfield’s (2000) report, ‘*A Creative Education*’, and written for A&B, describes organisational theatre as offering ‘non-threatening ways’ of enabling discussion of potentially difficult issues such as conflict management or diversity. While these seem to be contrasting perspectives, it could be argued that what is implicitly being referenced is the concept of catharsis. While the meaning has been debated over the centuries (Meisiek 2004; Shepherd and Wallis 2004), the theatre studies literature has tended to use catharsis as a term to ‘explain the effect on an audience at the end of a tragedy, or indeed a serious play’ (Shepherd and Wallis 2004 p.175). Broadly speaking, ‘catharsis figures as a cultural safety valve because it leaves the audience drained and safely calm’ (ibid. p.175). This in turn offers psychological safety, in order that ‘those who would change must feel safe enough about the possibility of change to get past their own fear of change’ (Taylor 2008 p.402).

## **Approaches to Organisational Theatre**

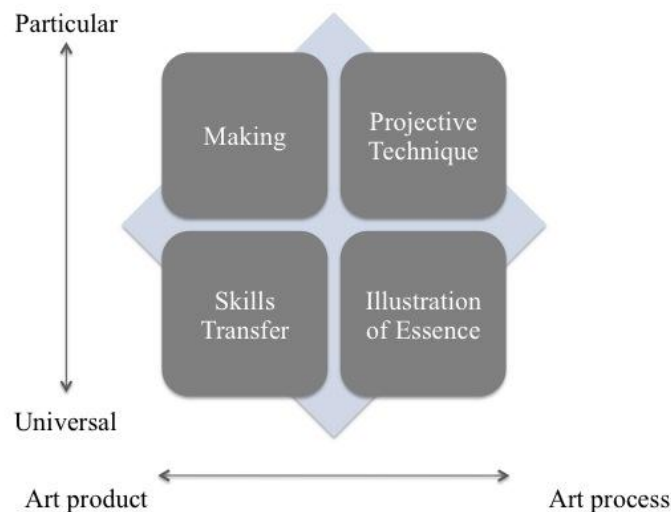
To date a number of frameworks have been offered to enable differentiation between approaches to organisational theatre which provide a starting point for a more systematic evaluation of the potential effects of such activities. Schreyögg (cited in Meisiek 2002a) provides a typology using the dimensions of organisational specificity and performance professionalism, sub-divided into improvised (the spontaneous development of problematic issues by employees) and stage managed (offering a pre-defined message) categories. The classifications provide a clear overview of the different approaches, although the terminology used seems specific to German and Scandinavian interventions (for example, Turnkey productions). This framework is underpinned by the extent of audience participation, which is used in Nissley et al.’s (2004) classifications, using the dimensions of control of script/control of role, which both broadens the scope of Schreyögg’s definitions and draws attention to the potential tensions in the delivery of organisational theatre.

Clark’s typology, based on Mangham and Overington’s (1987) proposal that a performance is a triadic collusion between scriptwriter, actor and audience, categorises organisational theatre according to the adaptability of the performance (the extent to which a performance can be modified at either the design stage or during the performance) and role of the audience (from active to passive). Like Schreyögg,

the underlying assumption in this categorisation is that organisation theatre will involve some kind of dramatic performance, but may be more or less susceptible to modification depending on the overarching purpose of the event.

In these models there is an emphasis on ‘theatre’ rather than ‘drama’. The distinction between the two in the theatre studies literature is, to some extent, problematic in that writers and researchers, while acknowledging the differences are often reluctant to privilege one term over another (Nicholson 2005). However it is suggested that in relation to organisational theatre it is worth considering their meanings. Epistemologically, theatre is derived from the Greek ‘*theatron*’ meaning ‘viewing place’ (Nicholson 2005) or *to* look, contemplate, or view as spectators (Hartnoll 1968); drama is derived from the Greek ‘*drān*’, to make or perform (Hartnoll 1976: Nicholson 2005). Thus Taylor (1980 cited in Nicholson 2005) distinguishes between applied drama as being process-based and applied theatre as being performance-based; these distinctions have not been fully considered in the organisational theatre literature, the emphasis in the two typologies considered above (which are in turn based on Schreyögg (1999) cited in Meisiek 2002) tending towards the presentation of a staged performance. Taylor and Ladkin (2009) offer a typology of arts-based learning processes, which aims to reconcile the two perspectives, and distinguishes between the methods, in turn providing a framework for evaluating arts-based approaches to learning (Figure 3.1).

**Figure 3.1 Typology of Arts-based Methods (Taylor and Ladkin 2009 p.61)**



Taylor and Ladkin (2009) suggest that arts-based methods are underpinned by four distinctive processes; the horizontal axis, (product/process), differentiates between activities that are focused on the end result, the art product itself and those activities which are focused on the process of creating the work. The vertical axis, (particular/ universal), differentiates between activities which focus on an

individual's unique experience, either through the process of making art or through the meaning an individual projects onto the art product (particular) and the universal, which is concerned with either universal skills through the process of, for example, theatre workshop exercises, or with capturing a 'universally recognizable understanding, such as the nature of leadership in Shakespeare's Henry V' (ibid 2009 p.61). The strength of this typology is that it is based on an underpinning epistemology which relates specifically to the purpose and espoused outcomes of such interventions. Of course, the four quadrants cannot be seen as mutually exclusive and, as Taylor and Ladkin note, 'many if not most arts-based methods combine two or more of these processes' (ibid p.61).

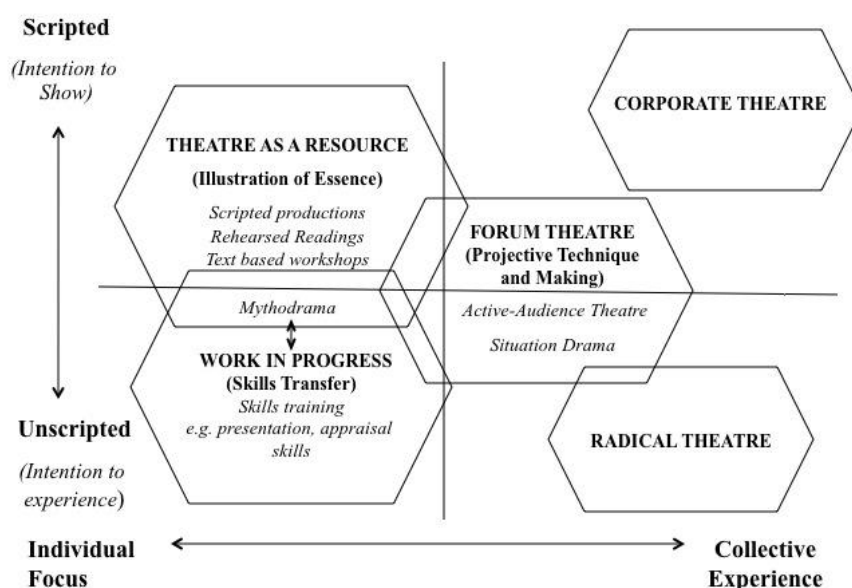
As Taylor and Ladkin (2009) note, the use of arts-based methods draws on the presentational form of knowing, that is knowing which 'provides the first form of expressing meaning and significance through drawing on expressive forms of imagery through movement, dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, story, drama, and so on' (Heron and Reason 2001 p.183). Much of learning and development has tended to be based on propositional knowledge, 'those ideas and theories expressed in informative statements' (ibid). The use of arts-based interventions can be viewed as a move away from the rational and logical approach to individual and organisational development, towards a more intuitive approach, providing a stimulus for participants to access and view their own experiences and form emotional connections to those experiences (Taylor and Ladkin 2009).

## **A Typology of Organisational Theatre**

Building on the definitions and frameworks considered in previously in this chapter, and incorporating Taylor and Ladkin's (2009) model, Figure 3.2 below provides a revised typology of organisational theatre interventions. The typology is used to explore the different approaches used in theatre-based interventions, and will compare and contrast such approaches with the applied theatre methodology and with Taylor and Ladkin's arts-based approaches.



**Figure 3.2 Typology of Organisational Theatre<sup>4</sup>**



The passive/active continuum (Clark 2008; Nissley et al. 2004) has been expanded to incorporate both the drama/theatre and active/passive continuums, Thus the vertical axis draws on Nicholson’s (2005) distinction between theatre and theatre, drama and Bolton’s (1993) proposition that that theatre and drama when used in the educational context can be defined through ‘the intention to experience and the intention to show’ (p.40). While Bolton uses these categories in relation to drama- and theatre-in-education, they are equally applicable to theatre-based interventions in organisations. The ‘intention to show’ assumes that the event is primarily scripted, the intention to experience assumes a more improvisational event, which in turn impacts on where overall control of the event sits and the levels of audience participation. This axis therefore integrates the ‘process / product’ continuum (Taylor and Ladkin 2009) and the active/passive spectator continuum (Clark 2008; Nissley et al. 2004).

The horizontal axis is based on the extent to which the activity is aimed at individual level or group/organisational. Within the academic literature and at the macro-level there appears to be general support for the proposition that organisations employ organisation theatre companies to bring about learning (and implicitly change and adaptation) at an individual, team and/or organisational level (Clark 2008; Clark and Mangham 2004a; Meisiek and Barry 2007; Schreyögg 2001; Schreyögg and Hopfl 2004). The vertical axis relates to the extent to which the event is aimed primarily at an individual (for example, skills development) or collective level (for example, developing awareness of

<sup>4</sup> It is noted that Taylor and Ladkin’s (2009) theatre- or play-making is not offered as a separate organisational theatre activity. Very few examples could be found in the organisational theatre literature of theatre-making, apart from brief references to ‘plays in a day’ activities, aimed at team building. However, forum theatre, as referenced in the applied theatre literature, incorporates aspects of play-making, hence placing ‘making’ as part of the forum theatre quadrant.

diversity). The following section explores these forms of organisational theatre, organised around the typology, through providing a brief description of the different forms.

### **Theatre as Work-in-Progress**

This approach tends towards the unscripted or improvisational method and is aimed at individual skills development. One common example of such activities in this quadrant is the use of actor role-plays to enable interpersonal skills development; thus participants use their own experiences to develop a 'script'. Many organisational theatre providers started by providing actors to work with individual employees on training and development programmes designed to enhance interpersonal skills, such as giving feedback, handling redundancies or managing appraisal (Nissley et al. 2004; Pickard 2000) Role play has always been a familiar part of such training, emphasising the need for practising such skills, but in the past the role players tended to be other participants on the training course, some of whom found the business of 'acting' both challenging and perhaps embarrassing. The unscripted/improvisational approach is also used in relation to approaches drawing on theatre rehearsal techniques to develop, for example, presentation or communication skills as exemplified by the development arms of the National Theatre, Theatreworks:

*Theatreworks* is a management development programme ... that draws on the techniques used by actors and directors in the rehearsal room, to offer *experiential* workshops. The workshops are designed to encourage confident and creative communication by stretching the voice, the body and the imagination" ([www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/Theatreworks](http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/Theatreworks)).

Such activities resonate with Taylor and Ladkin's (2009) model, 'skills transfer' with the focus on the process of theatre-making being used to enhance skills. Here, it is not the theatre product which is being used, but the process of developing theatre.

### **Theatre as a Resource**

In the top left-hand corner these interventions make use of existing drama texts to enhance understanding of issues such as leadership, power, responsibility, ethics (see Corrigan 1997; Garaventa 1998; Mangham 2000; Marini 2002). Thus a play will be presented either as a rehearsed reading, or an actual stage performance, to a selected audience who are then invited to discuss the issues that the play raises with a view either to developing 'solutions' or enhancing understanding of different perspectives. While the play and discussion will be a collective experience, the intention, broadly speaking, is that the **individual** will, through the play and the subsequent discussions, apply their 'new' thinking on return to the workplace.

'Mythodrama', an approach developed by Richard Olivier, (the son of Laurence Olivier), spans two the left-hand quadrants, being described as 'A synthesis of story-telling and theatre skills'. 'Mythodrama'

draws on leadership stories from Shakespeare, ‘using theatrical expertise to create transformational experiences in the safe environment of a rehearsal room’ (www.oliviermythodrama.com). As one ‘Mythodrama’ participant comments in relation to a workshop using Shakespeare’s Henry V:

The scenes of the night before the battle crystallised the loneliness of command for me and also show the need for managers today to get out and about among their staff, to know what people are thinking at all levels (cited in McKee 1999)

This approach contains some applied theatre elements, but it should be noted that the dramatic representations are universal rather than specific – in Taylor and Ladkin’s (2009) terms, ‘illustration of essence’, which focuses on the art or theatre product rather than the process but, in contrast to the definitions provided in the organisational studies literature (see Meisiek 2007; Meisiek and Barry 2008; Schreyögg 2001), cannot be described as organisationally specific. In addition, this approach is aimed at developing individual leadership skills, rather than community or organisational change.

When comparing with applied theatre methodologies, while work-in-progress activities can be found in theatre-in-education practices (rather than educational theatre), applied theatre practices tend to be used to provide a collective experience. Thus the practices which resonate most closely with the organisational studies and applied theatre literature can be found in the right-hand quadrant and are outlined in the next section.

### **Corporate Theatre and Forum Theatre**

A growing practice involves organisations hiring theatre groups to stage specifically designed theatrical performances in front of organisational audiences, with the aim of using acting as an *organisational* (my italics) intervention (that is changing working behaviours) (Nissley et al. 2004p.3).

It is in the right quadrant that the majority of academic commentary can be found and indeed, the majority of the literature to date has focused on the organisational theatre practices which can be found in this quadrant. Schreyögg’s (2001) and Hopfl and Schreyögg’s (2004) propose that organisational theatre has four specific elements, namely *theatrical presentation* (performers staging a play), *organisational specificity* (drama focusing on a problem faced by the organisation), *defined audience* (normally the employees) and *specifically commissioned* (for the organisation) – these elements can be found in both the corporate and forum theatre modes, although the approaches differ significantly in terms of intentions. The following section compares and contrasts the two approaches.

### *Corporate Theatre - Theatre as Technology*

Corporate theatre<sup>5</sup> (Clark and Mangham 2004b; Clark 2008) also defined as Industrial Theatre (Pineault 1987) is a theatrical (rather than dramatic in the exact sense of the word) intervention aimed at the whole organisation. The intention is one of showing, using theatre to convey a specific message with no opportunities for interventions from the defined audience.

... the essence of all industrial shows was in the corporate message, and without the message the Industrial show would be worthless – the Industrial production’s intention was to educate and motivate ... not merely to entertain its audience. Furthermore the Industrial production demonstrated to its audiences that the company cared about the employees and the company was thriving and here to stay (Pineault 1987 p.186).

Clark and Mangham (2004a), echoing Pineault’s emphasis on the increasingly sophisticated use of theatre technology<sup>6</sup> (lighting, sound, music and effects) describe such interventions as ‘theatre as technology’ noting that such productions involve state of the art technology that might be expected in West End musicals; in addition corporate theatre events are normally constructed on a bespoke, one-off basis, making them highly expensive.

However, while such interventions are tailored specifically for the audience, using the technology and, to some extent, the language of theatre, it is argued that corporate theatre falls outside the scope of applied theatre model; the staged representations are theatrical, rather than dramatic, and provide no scope for the audience to adapt the script. Furthermore, delivery and reception are highly controlled by management in order to present a single, rather than multiple, reality. As Clark (2008) notes:

Corporate theatre is not democratic. It is used to contain reflection and to promote the views of a particular group within an organisation ... the audience therefore passively receive a message ... control of delivery and reception is of critical importance if a single reality is to be sustained’ (p.404).

Thus, unlike applied theatre practices, corporate theatre promotes a unitarist perspective, ‘the single reality’, rather than offering up the performance space to the employees to discuss and even dispute the issues. Should corporate theatre, therefore, be included in an organisational theatre typology? Certainly the elements of staged presentations, organisational specificity, defined audience and specific commissioning (Schreyögg and Hopfl 2004) are present and aims to bring about organisational change (Clark and Mangham (2004b), albeit through seducing rather than challenging its audience (Clark 2008). What corporate theatre does not offer is an opportunity to explore organisational differences or resolve organisational conflict, which, from the earlier discussion in this chapter, is the aim of other

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<sup>5</sup> In the US Corporate Theatre is the term US Equity use for theatre performed in an organisational setting. It should be noted that Corporate Theatre is defined by Smith (1997) as a term which incorporates a broader range of interventions; for the purposes of this discussion corporate theatre is considered as one manifestation of organisational theatre.

<sup>6</sup> Clark later uses the term ‘theatre as technology’ to incorporate all presented and performed organisational theatre activities.

organisational theatre activities; it assumes that its audience of employees would be in support of the management perspective. Thus, while this form bears little relation to applied theatre practices, nevertheless, given the emphasis on the theatrical (rather than dramatic) elements, retains its place in the canon of organisational theatre activities. Forum theatre, which can be found in the fourth quadrant, integrates applied and organisational theatre methodologies, and is explored in the final section of this chapter.

### ***Forum Theatre - Organisational Theatre?***

Forum theatre is ... a theatrical game in which a problem is shown in an unsolved form, to which the audience ... is invited to suggest and enact solution (Jackson 2002 p.xxiv).

The lower right quadrant contains what is probably the most discussed category of organisational theatre within the academic literature and, as noted earlier, much of the commentary appears to conflate organisational theatre and forum theatre. Many forum theatre interventions start with a staged presentation, often based on organisational experiences, with the espoused aim of attempting to show the hidden or overlooked and a depiction of new futures (Meisiek 2002; Clark and Mangham 2004b; Meisiek and Barry 2007). Thus, in contrast to corporate theatre, 'roles and plots are emergent rather than scripted' (Meisiek and Barry 2007 p.1806), offering a pluralist rather than unitarist approach to organisational learning and change processes.

Thus while both corporate and forum theatre interventions aim to engage the audience, corporate theatre appears to achieve this through the creation of a theatrical spectacle. In contrast, forum theatre engages its audience or participants through creating opportunities to engage in active discussion around a specific organisational issue with the aim of considering different perspectives, identifying areas of dissatisfaction and, through that identification, take action on an individual and/or organisational basis. Thus,

... having seen a staged dialectic, group members enter into a dialogue as equals – through dialogue they become aware of their situation and of the possibility that their situation could be different' (Meisiek and Barry 2007 p.1808).

In the context of relating this approach to applied theatre models, an exemplar can be found through the work of Cardboard Citizens, a UK theatre company founded by Adrian Jackson<sup>7</sup>, which uses forum theatre to work with homeless and ex-homeless people. Babbage (2004) provides a summary of the Cardboard Citizens model which resonates with the processes of forum theatre in the organisational context (see Clark and Mangham 2004a; Gibb 2004; Meisiek and Barry 2007):

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<sup>7</sup> Adrian Jackson is the English translator of the majority of Boal's writings, collaborated with Augusto Boal on a variety for forum theatre projects, and is the foremost forum theatre trainer in the UK

First and foremost, it ... presents a **story or stories with which the audience can identify** and does in an **entertaining** manner. Secondly, it directly acknowledges issues of **power and powerlessness** but suggests that these **dynamics are changeable**. Thirdly it is not **didactic** but rather founded on the belief that audience members themselves have at least some of the answers. Fourthly it **provokes responses** from the spectators which may be partially or fully theatrical, or may remain at the level of discussion, but which in any case are **interactive** and critical of the initial 'authoritative' narrative. Fifth this activity is contained within a **safe space** – a **rehearsal** for reality in which participants can practise and reflect upon possible strategies for change (p.71).

In the context of organisational theatre, Nissley et al. (2004) place forum theatre in the improvised / self directed mode – the forum theatre model they provide mirrors Babbage's (2004) description above, and would be familiar to observers of forum theatre in the UK, where a 'full presentation is offered to the audience' (p.11) followed by an invitation for the audience (or spect-actors) to replay the scene or story if they see something that they would like to do differently. This model is similar to the one described at the beginning of chapter one, although the improvisations in that particular forum theatre event were unrelated to the original dramatic presentation.

In relation to other forms of organisational theatre, what differentiates forum theatre from other types of theatre-based interventions is the role of the collective active-audience (Meisiek and Barry 2007) as opposed to individual active participants. As noted earlier, in theatre workshop and role-playing activities the focus is on the individual, building specific skills on an individual or team level. Forum theatre tends to be used for organisational change with larger audiences/participants and aims to enable discussion and dialogue across the organisation. In comparison with corporate theatre, the audience is looking on; in forum or active-audience theatre the audience is 'doing', becoming participants in the drama, either as directors or actors. Thus the corporate theatre model aims to maintain and support the management perspective whereas the forum theatre model, in theory at least, offers a pluralist or pluri-vocal perspective, aiming to provide opportunities to reflect on and even challenge the status quo.

Radical theatre (Coopey 1998; 2002) appears as a 'type' in its own right, but it can also be viewed as a subset of forum/active-audience theatre. Coopey (2002) distinguishes between 'conventional theatre workshops' which focus on developing individual skills (work-in-progress) and 'radical workshops' which use Boal's model of forum theatre. This is an interesting distinction as while it would appear that here forum theatre and radical theatre are being used synonymously, Coopey's focus is on the outcomes of using theatre, rather than providing a specific description of inputs, and he draws specifically on forum theatre to outline a (possibly) utopian view of how theatre might bring about individual and thereby organisational change. Coopey emphasises the use of this form of organisational theatre to create a 'learning space', with the potential to create learning which is 'potentially anti-foundational, anti the system and not easily orchestrated' (Fulop and Rifkin 1997 p.58). Coopey argues that these learning spaces can be developed by employing theatre workshop

activities as a way of opening up dialogue and debate, **or** through the use of forum theatre techniques. In both cases, the emphasis is on the experience or process rather than on the specific product.

## Conclusion

This chapter has explored the nature and purpose of organisational theatre and supports that proposition that ‘organisational theatre is not one practice but many’ (Meisiek and Barry 2007 p.1806); the typology of organisational theatre (Figure 3.2 above) shows that different forms aim to achieve different outcomes, ranging from development of individual skills (work-in-progress) through to large-scale organisational change (corporate and forum theatre). Thus, this definition goes beyond Schreyögg’s (2001) focus on the presentation of organisationally specific plays, presented to an defined audience by professional performers, to incorporate any activity which draws on theatre- or drama-based techniques with the intention of bringing about some change within organisations. However, within the organisational studies literature, the focus has been on the use of organisational theatre to address organisational issues, implicitly referencing corporate and forum theatre interventions, with less attention, in the academic literature at least, being paid to the more individually focused approaches (Clark 2008).

However, even the categorisation of organisational approaches is not without problems. Firstly, as Taylor and Ladkin (2009) suggest, there are overlaps between the different categories; thus, for example, forum theatre can be analysed as an activity that may incorporate theatre-making, skills transfer and projective technique (ibid.). This in turn highlights a particular tension in organisational theatre approaches (Nissley et al. 2004). The model outlined by Schreyögg (2001) places the emphasis on a scripted dramatic representation presented by professional performers; in such cases, the role of the audience is to observe a version of organisational ‘reality’ defined by management – thus, control of the intervention lies with the management. At the other end of the continuum, there is the ‘self-directed/active performer’ (Nissley et al 2004 p.826) which is found in Boal’s model of forum theatre, where the script itself is self-improvised and ‘the audience member is an active and self-directed performer’ (ibid. p.827). Thus activities found under the title of ‘work-in-progress’ may appear to be self-improvised; however, in the organisational context, socialisation processes may constrain the organisational actor. Even though the ‘improvisation’ is not subject to overt managerial control, the individual may be aware of the expected behaviours. Thus, such improvisations can also be seen as rehearsals for enacting the real event. As Schreyögg and Hopfl (2004) argue:

These rehearsals for everyday actions are ways of relating desired behaviours to desired outcomes ... the actors walk through their roles marking the movements, turns, and positions which support the performance of the piece. In training, the manager rehearses a range of possible behaviours which are appropriate or inappropriate to the extent that they achieve the objectives of the organization (p.694).

This chapter highlights the tensions in introducing theatre-based interventions; firstly, the lack of a clearly defined terminology, secondly a conflation of the various forms of such interventions, the ‘one size fits’ all approach, and thirdly, particularly in relation to what will be the focus of this research, the differing perspectives between practitioners and academics as to what forum theatre (and, indeed, other forms of theatre-based interventions) is and what can be achieved in the organisational context, that is, the extent to which such interventions genuinely enable ‘safe’ spaces to discuss, debate and challenge the status quo. However, by drawing on both the performance and organisational studies literature, it is possible to identify specific features of each of the forms of organisational theatre, which are shown in Table 3.1 below.



**Table 3.1 Comparison of approaches: applied and organisational theatre forms (from the literature)**

Features	Applied Theatre Form	Organisational Theatre Forms			
		Work-in-Progress	Theatre as a Resource	Corporate Theatre	Forum/Situation/ Active-Audience Theatre
Staged presentation/dramatic representation	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
(Organisational) specificity	Yes	No	No	Yes	Yes
Defined audience	Normally	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Specifically commissioned	n/a	Yes	Possibly	Yes	Yes
Focus	Group	Individual	Individual	Group	Group
(Inter) active-audience	Yes	n/a	Yes	No	Yes
Performance space	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
'Learning' space <sup>8</sup>	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
Intention	Exploring society/community change	Skills transfer	Raising awareness or Leadership Development ( <i>Methodrama</i> )	Supporting / promoting organisational change	Exploring / supporting organisational Change
Perspective	Pluralist/Radical	(Potentially) pluralist	(Potentially) pluralist	Unitarist	Pluralist/Radical

Of the four 'categories' of organisational theatre, cited in Table 3.2 above, forum theatre can be most closely compared with models of applied theatre. This is hardly surprising given that there is a synergy between the methods used in theatre-in-education and community/applied theatre programmes, and the methods developed by Augusto Boal. It is this method that will be the focus of this research, on a number of grounds. Firstly, the literature, with its continued reference to the work of Augusto Boal, suggests that forum theatre has the potential to be the most radical way bringing about change within in organisations (Coopey 1998, 2002; Gibb 2004). However, at the same time, it is also the

<sup>8</sup> 'Learning spaces' are defined here as the provision of opportunities for dialogue and discussion among participants. The concept of the learning space will be explored further in chapter 4

most 'problematical' form of organisational theatre, given its political origins, the resource intensive nature of the activity, and the potential tensions in relation to scripted and improvised elements.

Thus, the next chapter develops the discussion provided in this chapter, through an exploration of the particular features of forum theatre. Consideration will be given to the nature of performance spaces, the purpose of the dramatic representations, the ways in which such representations impact on the role of the audience/participants and the development of learning spaces.

# CHAPTER 4

## FROM ORGANISATIONAL THEATRE TO FORUM THEATRE

### **Introduction**

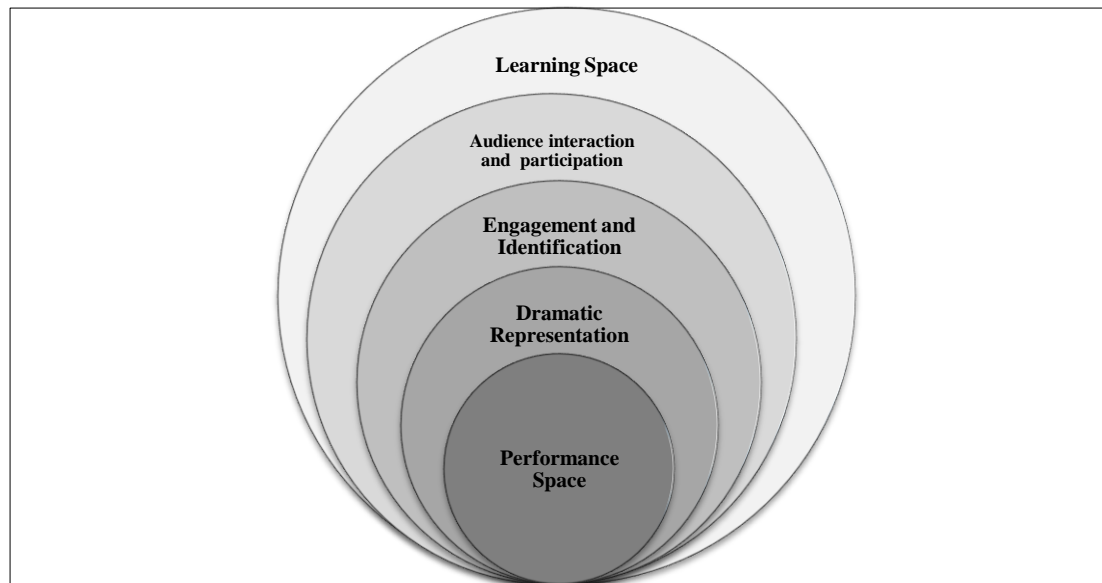
Having explored the nature and purpose of organisational theatre, the third and final chapter of the literature review explores the nature of forum theatre, thus addressing the research question *‘to identify the components of forum theatre and ascertain the extent to which to which the process (or components of the process) support or hinder the perceived purpose from the perspective of the stakeholders’*.

As discussed in chapter three, forum theatre can be differentiated from other forms of organisational theatre, firstly, in relation to being the closest in form to applied theatre definitions, and secondly in terms of focusing on the collective, rather than individual, experience. This chapter focuses on forum theatre, in relation to the features identified in the previous chapter and aims to explore the form of forum theatre specifically in relation to the organisational context. It also explores how the impact of such interventions can be understood, and a consideration of the evaluation of the process.

### **Features of Forum Theatre**

The previous chapter provided a comparison of applied theatre in its generic form, and different forms of organisational theatre (see Table 3.1 above). In addition, the forum theatre model in the previous chapter, provided by Babbage (2004), offers a basis for the development of further understanding of forum theatre in the organisational context, through the identification of a number of components, identified in figure 4.1 below.

**Figure 4.1 Features of Forum Theatre**



These features or components can be viewed from both a pedagogic and performance-based perspective. Forum theatre activities take place within a particular 'space', a recurring theme in the organisational and performance studies literature. This encompasses the literal performance space (Jackson 2007; Mangham 2000; Nicholson 2004), the metaphorical learning space (Coopey 2002; Fulop and Rifkin 1997) and the creation of liminal spaces (Coopey 2002; Kershaw 1992; Turner 1982). Within this space, a story or narrative is presented through the dramatic form reflecting some aspect of organisational life which needs to be addressed (Babbage 2004; Nicholson 2005; Schreyögg 2001); the narrative is presented in such a way that provokes some kind of response from the participants which in turn leads to participant interaction with the actors, through either '*simultaneous dramaturgy*' (participants remain in their seats) or through '*forum*' (participants become spect-actors) (Boal 1992; Babbage 2004). Thus theatre is offered as a method of enabling individual change, through the exploration of issues that are relevant to the audience situation; it is provocative (as otherwise it is unlikely to produce discussion), interactive and, unlike plays staged in a more 'traditional' forum, it encourages the audience to be critical of what is presented and take the story forward in ways that are relevant to them. The notion of space, a recurring theme in the performance studies literature, is emphasised and the end result being one of possible change, starting with the individual but implicitly with the aim of eventually impacting on the community within which the event takes place.

This chapter takes as its starting point the theatrical event and the creation of different types of spaces. Consideration of the use of narrative through the dramatic form, the starting point for forum theatre events, before exploring the use of these narratives or stories to create identification and engagement with the organisational issues, which in turns aims to provoke reactions in the participants leading to discussion and dialogue. It should be noted here that dialogue in this context goes beyond conversation

or even interaction, and draws on Isaacs' definition (1993) as 'a sustained collective inquiry into the processes, assumptions and certainties that compose everyday experiences' (p.25). A key aspect of forum theatre, the audience as participant, is discussed together with the issues relating to audience participation in such events, particularly within the organisational context. The first section of this discussion explores the concept of space in forum theatre; given the inter-relationship between the performance space and learning spaces, the two concepts are explored in tandem, before moving on to discuss the other features of forum theatre activities.

### **Theatre, Space and Performance**

I can take any empty space and call it a bare stage; a man walks across this empty space while someone else is watching him and this is all that is needed for an act of theatre to be engaged (Brook 1968 p.11).

So starts Peter Brook's *The Empty Space*, his seminal work on the nature of theatre, and it is an apt way to start this section. As noted previously, the theme of 'space' resonates in both the performance studies and learning literature and in relation to forum theatre encompasses three areas – the literal performance space and the relationship between the actors and the audience (Bennett 2002; McAuley 1997), 'liminal' and 'ludic' spaces referred to in both performance and organisational and social theatre studies (see Coopey 2002; Kershaw 1992; Turner 1982) and the learning space (Coopey 2002; Fulop and Rifkin 1998). Why it is of value to explore these three dimensions is because they relate to each other; the physical performance space impacts on the degree of participation that can be enabled in the event, as well as providing space for reflection and engagement with the process.

In the theatre the space becomes the literal area where actors create meaning from a text or even simply an idea. In a rehearsal space, 'one of the rules of engagement in ensemble theatre ... is the notion of suspending the hierarchy ... for the purposes of work, of getting this team to be creative, you have to dump all that stuff' (Ibbotson 2002). In this type of space, Ibbotson argues that all members of the ensemble need to be in an ego-less space, where competitive notions are suspended ...' (ibid). Thus Ibbotson suggests it is possible to re-create similar 'rules of engagement' within organisations, through an understanding of both the rehearsal processes and the relationship between the director and performers.

In applied and organisational theatre, participants have the potential to be both performers and audience, moving between the two roles to a greater or lesser extent. These roles may be both 'liminal' – a social space that is 'betwixt and between more permanent social roles – and 'ludic', 'playing around with the norms, customs, regulations, laws, which govern life in society' (Kershaw 1992 p.24). Thus theatre has the potential to offer a space where the participants may drop the normal rules of organisational engagement and construct 'new understandings as a basis for action' (ibid p.24).

However, when a production moves from rehearsal to performance the notion of space changes. Arguably, in performance, as Brook proposes, the space can be transformed into whatever the director, designer, actors and audience can make it be. Historically, the audience has tended to be separated from the players; from Boal's perspective this separation is viewed as being the aristocracy taking possession of the theatre as a form of 'coercive indoctrination' (Boal 1979 p.119). However, as Clark and Mangham (2004a) note, few theatre scholars would agree with this particular analysis and as Jackson suggests it is this separation of audience and performers which provides 'aesthetic distance', enabling the audience 'to see, reflect, perhaps understand more clearly than we normally might beyond the noise and flux of everyday life' (2007 p. 140).

In the context of forum theatre Clark and Mangham (2004a) argue that by clearly delineating the space between actors and audience, it is not then possible for actors and audience to meet in an equal space, as already the scene is set whereby it would appear that one group of people (the actors) have a privileged vantage point.

... by creating a distance between the actors and audience conventional forms of theatre elevate the position of those on stage, with the consequence that there is an imbalance of power between actors and audience. There is no opportunity for the free exchange of ideas, since the views and understandings of the former are privileged at the expense of the latter (p.847).

Thus the literal performance space has an impact on how the (metaphorical) learning space is perceived by participants. Fulop and Rifkin (1997) see the development of such spaces as being the key to organisational learning and development and propose a learning space where 'there is a suspension of truth or knowledge claims ... when participants are able to accept that no view is a priori authoritative or true [and] managers have no claim to a privileged vantage point' (p.59).

In a similar vein, Burgoyne and Jackson (1997) provide the 'arena thesis' of learning. The arena is described as 'any setting, event, or process that allows ideas to be shared or explored between people and interest groups' (p.61) which enables the facilitation of processes which are 'directed at the creation, questioning and development of joint meaning in organisations' (ibid.) Both propositions (the learning space or the arena) approach promote a pluralist rather than unitarist approach to learning and in this context the arena is a place where 'differences "meet", [are] fought over, reconciled, and reconfigured ... and gives voice to the tensions between a pluralistic approach to [management] learning where participants can observe and become aware of differences' (p.61). Not only being aware, perhaps, of differences, but also, as Thrift (2000) suggests, to develop organisational creativity through 'the establishment of innovative groups able to deploy different techniques and the ... development of spaces in which individuals can create' (p.681).

Thus, in such spaces no one person's voice is privileged, which requires a space where hierarchy is suspended so that, in theatre terms, the spear carrier has as much opportunity to contribute to the

process as has the Hamlet or Henry V. This view resonates with Örténblad's (2002) perspective of organisational learning, which aims to promote a learning climate which is supported by a formal system of democratic rules, guaranteeing the freedom of individuals and opportunities for reflection, whether learning is formal or spontaneous. Thus it is proposed that the use of forum theatre can be a vehicle for organisational learning by allowing the 'rank and file' members of organisations to work on an equal basis with their 'superiors' (Coopey 1998).

However it should perhaps be noted that training programmes (and by association learning, development and organisational change programmes) 'continue to reflect the continuing influence and power of the institutional beliefs and patterns associated with the traditional educational sector' (Scott and Meyer 1994 cited in Burgoyne and Jackson 1997 p.57). Noting the current debate on the perceived shift from tight management control or bureaucratic organisational models to more open-ended approaches, they make two pertinent points; firstly that the shift has possibly been honoured more in the breach than in the observance, and secondly, that the extent to which current management learning initiatives are congruent with this approach is fairly limited, with those sponsoring such initiatives being over-preoccupied with the distillation of unitarist rather than pluralist values, which a more democratic approach requires. Management learning activities then become instrumentalised, thus excluding the 'cognitive, political and symbolic elements of management development' (Clarke and Butcher 2006 p.314).

Burgoyne and Jackson (1997) also argue that learning within organisations tends to be based on a unitarist perspective and that the dominant approach to learning activities is to tie them to a specific purpose. While their discussion focuses primarily on management learning, their argument can equally apply to the majority of learning activities that take place in organisations. Furthermore, a preoccupation with behaviour or 'competency development' often results in learning and development being increasingly tied to supporting and advancing the organisation's instrumental and technical objectives. Thus an increasing managerial vocationalism and rationality have resulted in decreasing, rather than enhancing, the scope of management learning (Holman 2000); with the increased and continuous interest in competency development and management processes the same point can also be made in relation to non-managerial learning processes.

This may be due to stakeholder influences, the desire to establish legitimacy through promotion of new ideas or fads (Clark and Greatbatch 2004) and increasing business professionalism. Thus, for example, the Chartered Management Institute and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development are increasingly imposing their own unitarist standards of learning and development, leaving little space for the consideration of wider issues or the development of new ideas (Gilmore and Taylor 2007; Holman 2000). Thus there is a tension between enabling the types of learning events, such as forum theatre, where the espoused aim is to open up debate and discussion, with the potential for unpredictable outcomes and the desire for learning events to meet clear and stated specific results.

Is then the notion of forum theatre having the ability to de-hierarchise learning no more than an espoused ideal? In theory, this type of intervention should offer staff the opportunity to engage equally in addressing organisational issues, but this proposition conflicts with management perceptions of where legitimate control 'sits' typified by the reluctance of employers to consult and involve staff in organisational decisions. In spite of an increasing amount of European legislation concerning consultation in the workplace (Coopey and Burgoyne 2000), in reality 'people are denied space in which they can take risks in improvising aspects of self and social relationships whenever they have few opportunities to make useful contributions to decisions that affect them' (ibid p.186.).

Furthermore socialisation processes within organisations may make employees reluctant to engage on an equal level, or voice concerns, ideas or emotions which go against the organisational norms. Creating learning spaces does not remove perceptions of the expert who may be brought in to facilitate such spaces, as is the case in theatre-based and forum theatre interventions. While an ideal theatre rehearsal space is one where hierarchies are suspended (Ibbotson 2002; 2007) even here the director may still be viewed as 'the person to whom others look for the provision of a sub-text; once provided, the individual structures and processes which support it can be put in place by lesser mortals' (Mangham and Overington 1987 p.175). In forum theatre, the director may be replaced both by senior management, who provide the overall vision, and the facilitator charged with carrying out their intentions. Such 'intentions' are normally signalled through the production of a script, the dramatic representation of the issues - given that it is the managers who commission such events, they will have a significant role in bounding the issues that may be raised.

Thus the next section explores the purpose and use of the narratives that provide the basis for forum theatre interventions.

### **Telling a Story: The Dramatic Representation**

People have tried for centuries to use drama to change people's lives, to influence, to comment, to express themselves. It doesn't work. It might be nice if it worked but it doesn't. The only thing that the dramatic form is good for is telling a story (Mamet 1994 p.386).

This is a contentious statement (and designed to be so) and given the nature of Mamet's plays, somewhat disingenuous, but does raise the question of intentionality, namely that if playwrights set out with the intention of changing society there is the likelihood of failure, both in terms of creating a 'work of art' and in terms of realising the intentions (as noted previously). In Mamet's view then the purpose of the dramatic form is to tell a compelling story, it is then up to the audience to interpret its meaning for themselves.

However Mamet's comment draws attention to an important aspect of theatre, which is to tell a story and, in spite of the reservations expressed previously about the extent to which theatre can enable



change in society, there appears to be a general acknowledgement by commentators both from the organisational and performance studies literature that theatre, as played out in a public forum, has the ability to give audiences the opportunity to examine themselves, their behaviour, and/or their actions through the depiction of events on a stage (Mangham 2000) engaging the audience in the process of sensemaking (Weick 1995). The dramatic form therefore becomes the vehicle for this process through its ability to:

... show us several aspects of the action simultaneously and also convey several layers of action and emotion at the same time. So it can be said that drama is the most concrete form in which art can represent human emotions (Esslin 1976 p.18).

Weick (1995) views organisational narratives and stories as a key element in sense-making, proposing that such narratives fulfil a number of functions, in particular enabling 'people to talk about absent things and connect them with present things' (p.129). Thus what links the theatrical form and its use within organisations is the use of narrative as the process by which sense-making starts. Given that one of the espoused purposes of introducing drama into the workplace is to trigger discussion and dialogue within the organisation, narrative has an important role to play in theatre-based interventions, by enabling engagement with an issue as well as providing the means of communicating shared experiences and meanings. Thus through the on-stage depiction of organisational experiences, it is potentially possible to both confirm shared experiences and meanings of organisational members and groups and (again potentially) amend and alter perceptions of organisational reality (Boyce 1995) through the depiction of both the present and imaginative truth (Cole 1975).

Narratives form the backbone of drama, but this aspect of organisational theatre to some extent has been overlooked; although there has been considerable discussion of organisational stories as way of developing organisational communication and learning (Gabriel 2003) most commentaries focus on the use of organisational storytelling as 'the institutional memory system of the organisation' (Boje 1991 p.106), or how differing perspectives on stories or narratives can impact on communication and sense-making (Myers 2007). Clearly there is some resonance with the types of narrative employed in forum theatre; however, forum theatre offers what might be termed 'second-hand narratives', that is narratives that are developed not by the participants themselves (although they may have had input) but in collaboration with the commissioners/management and the theatre consultancy.

So what can forum theatre stories offer that is different from those presented in the public arena? After all there are numerous plays, presented in conventional theatre spaces, which could be seen as providing powerful critiques of social systems and aim to heighten awareness of a given issue (Nicholson 2004); over the past few years there has been a plethora of London West End theatre productions commenting on political issues, including the Iraq War (*Stuff Happens*); race relations in a local authority (*Playing with Fire*); the state of the British Rail Network (*The Permanent Way*) and the current economic crisis (*The Power of Yes*). Such enactments have the potential to increase social

or plural reflexivity, 'the ways in which a group tries to scrutinise, portray, understand and then act on itself' (Turner 1982 p.75). However, it can be argued that such productions, while aimed at increasing understanding or providing alternative perspectives of significant events, do not offer the opportunity to change the outcomes or influence government policy, thus supporting Mamet's (1994) point that theatre cannot, on its own, lead to societal change. Meisiek (2007) suggests that theatre as art searches for 'specific expressions of the universal whereas theatre presented in organisational settings searches for specific expressions for organisational problems' (p.192). Nevertheless, productions such as those cited above could be seen as providing specific expressions for societal issues, with the intention, as with political theatre generally, to draw attention to, and enable, discussion of the issues, although.

'The roots of theatre are in social drama' (Turner 1982 p.11) and through theatre performances the stories presented can increase a community's understanding of itself. Thus while the above examples are of large-scale productions being used to provide a theatrical experience, similarly Turner's (1982) concept of social drama can work on a smaller scale. Thus the potentially humdrum meeting presented on stage can demonstrate the conflicts of interest, overt and covert political manoeuvres, and the formation and breaking up of alliances that go on in everyday organisational life – in other words, the stuff of drama whether Shakespeare or Ayckbourn.

So what types of narratives are embodied in organisational theatre? Firstly of course the narrative is presented in the form of a dramatisation, which is designed to provoke reactions from the participants (Babbage 2004). Secondly, the stories may be provided in a variety of forms; they can show organisational reality as depicted in Meisiek and Barry's (2007) analysis of 'I Carry With A Smile'. They can depict an alternative reality, which takes place in what could be described as a 'parallel' universe, that is while it doesn't take place in the 'target organisation' it is clear that it is an accurate representation. Alternatively it may depict a future scenario, 'the imaginative truth' as with employees being presented with dramatisation of the organisation in the future (Clark and Mangham 2004a&b). It may represent the issues without any reference to the organisation - one of Cardboard Citizens' forum theatre productions, entitled '*Going off the Rails*', is a re-telling of the '*Three Little Pigs*' fairy tale, and is used as an allegory to explore the themes of homelessness and resettlement problems. Without downplaying any of these issues, the play uses a familiar story to enable engagement and identification with the plight of the protagonist (Babbage 2004).

Weick (1995) comments 'a good story holds disparate elements together long enough to allow people to make retrospective sense of whatever happens and engagingly enough that others will contribute their own inputs in the interests of sense-making' (p.61). As noted previously, the dramatic form represents 'tacit embodied knowing of direct sensory experience. We apprehend the artistic form directly as a whole in a way that is unmediated by logical reasoning. We make meaning of the artistic form in part based on how the artistic form resonates with our own experience' (Taylor 2008 p.399).

Dialogical approaches to learning have been the subject of a number of different academic discussions, which aim to move away from more traditional practices – many of these discussions centre on formal management development programmes both in educational and organisational settings, but the gist of the discussions can be transferred to other learning events, as in the case of forum theatre. Firstly the purpose of the events is to open up discussion among participants and, secondly, through presenting a mirror or analogy of the organisation, participants are, in theory, through recognition of themselves and their organisations, able to play out such discussions in a safe environment (Babbage 2004; Jackson 2007; Nicholson 2004).

This ability of theatre performances to act as a catalyst for discussion is cited by Meisiek (2002; 2003) as a means of evaluating the role that theatre can play in organisational change. Having argued previously that the lack of what might be called ‘on-stage’ participation in organisational forum theatre events does not necessarily make such activities worthless or untenable, alternative approaches to participation need to be considered. Using forum theatre as a vehicle for learning is related to more dialogical approaches to learning (Isaacs 1999; Raelin 2008), where ideas are discussed within a specific context with the aim of persuading others to follow this approach (Jackson 2007). In order for this to happen, it is suggested that the narrative, in the form of the dramatic representation, needs to stimulate an emotional response which is sufficient for the audience to be energised enough to move from spectating to participating (or spect-acting). Thus the next section explores the role of the audience in forum theatre events and considers the way in which forum theatre processes support the shift from audience to participant.

### **Audience, Participant or Spect-actor?**

Can the theatre exist without an audience? At least one spectator is needed to make it a performance. So we are left with the actor and the spectator. We can thus define the theatre as "what take place between spectator and actor". All the other things a supplementary - perhaps necessary, but nevertheless supplementary (Grotowski 1969 p.32).

A performance event is ‘what takes place between performers and spectators in a given time and space’ (McAuley 2004 p.235). Thus, unlike other art forms, for example, a work of art or a novel, drama presentations are collaborative activities, involving writers, directors, actors, technicians and audiences. As David Hare (1991) comments ‘a play is not actors; a play is not a text; a play is what happens between the stage and the audience’ (p.30). The audience then is a crucial part of that event; yet, with the exception of Meisiek and Barry (2007) and Elm and Taylor (2010), research on the lived experiences of the participants in an organisational theatre event is limited.

This lack of empirical research into audience perception is mirrored in the public theatre. As Balme (2008) notes, ‘a theatrical performance without an audience is at best a rehearsal, at worst a hypothetical construct’ (p.34). But in spite of the assumed centrality of the audience in the construction

of theatre and drama, little specific research has been undertaken on audiences' experiences of theatre processes (Balme 2008; Bennett 1997); such research that has been done tends to have been carried out by theatre marketing departments and has focused on who goes, why do they go, and how such a visit is evaluated (Balme 2008; Bennett 1997). It is of course perhaps not seen as an imperative for theatre in the public forum – if reviews are good, then people will attend, so the revenue stream continues. While it is interesting to note that many arts organisations are taking an interest in evaluating the 'customer experience', this activity tends towards considering the whole experience, with a focus on meeting customer expectations from booking onwards; thus while the event itself is clearly of importance, nevertheless, from this perspective it is viewed as being only part of that experience and is not necessarily 'evaluated' separately.

It should be noted that Schreyögg's (1998) model of organisational theatre assumes that 'confrontation and provocation' comes purely from the professional performance; in forum theatre interventions the term 'theatrical performance' expands to include the audience participation elements. and there is a danger of conflating two types of organisational theatre processes. In public theatre events, the audience are observers – while not necessarily passive observers, they do not have an opportunity to influence the proceedings, even though there may well be discussion following on from the production. In forum theatre however, a dramatic presentation is normally the pre-cursor to interactive drama. Thus the next section explores the shift from audience to participant and considers the various meanings of participation through the theatrical lens.

### ***The Audience as Participant***

In a Theatre of Oppressed session there are no spectators, only active-observers or spect-actors. The centre of gravity is the auditorium, not the stage (Boal 1995 p.40)

In the English speaking theatrical context 'theatre-going is defined by a series of complex behaviours that regulate the ways that spectators behave to each other and to the performance and performers on stage' (Balme 2008 p.37). Similar regulations can be applied to forum theatre; as Goffman (1974) notes in his discussion of the theatrical frame, 'a line is ordinarily maintained between a staging area where the performance proper occurs and an audience region where the watchers are located. The central understanding is that the audience has neither the right nor the obligation to participate directly in the dramatic action occurring on stage' (1974 p.125).

However, as discussed in the previous chapter, the applied and educational models of theatre place audience participation at the centre of such methodologies. Similarly, in the majority of organisational theatre interventions audience, participation in one form or another is seen as a given, participants at such events being both performers and audience (Coopey 2002). Such participation may occur from the start by involving employees in the scripting and development of the event or during it by asking them either to intervene spontaneously during the performance if they believe some action should be changed, or through post-production workshops where alternative scenes may be played out (see

Meisiek 2002a; Clark and Mangham 2004a; Meisiek and Barry 2007). The assumption here is that 'active participation facilitates the learning of roles and taking action in 'real life' (Meisiek 2002 p.4). It should be noted that the degree of participation may also be related to the degree of control that participants have over the event, and the extent to which such events are management- or employee-led (Nissley et al. 2004).

However, in terms of defining this concept, it is hard to pin down since the nature of participation potentially varies according to the type of event; modern theatre audiences are expected to turn off their mobile phones, sit quietly and not chat to their neighbours – when an audience member fails to obey these rules they may be castigated by other members of the audience, or even the actors. Hugh Jackman stopped the action during a performance of *'Days of Rain'* on Broadway in 2009 to berate a member of the audience whose mobile phone went off twice during the performance<sup>9</sup>. Nevertheless some type of reaction, depending on the production, is normally provoked, whether laughter, tears, gasps, cheers and applause. Thus, while an audience may appear to be passive, nevertheless theatre-going is an experience which commands attentiveness and in which the audience undoubtedly participates. And even though there be silence and apparent passivity, there may still be participation, 'the totally passive audience [being] a figment of the imagination, a practical impossibility' (Kershaw 1992 p.16). Hilton sees participation as being one (of five) principles of performance, describing participation as being the difference between 'sitting in front of a screen and facing a live actor', the latter offering 'opportunity for co-operation and collaboration' (1993 p.11).

Boal however, was clear about how participation in forum theatre is defined:

The participants who choose to intervene must continue the physical actions of the replaced actors; they are not allowed to come on the stage and talk, talk, talk... anyone can propose any solution but it must be done on stage, working, acting, doing things and not from the comfort of the seat" (Boal 1979 p.139).

However, some critics have questioned whether audience participation (that is, the relaxation of boundaries between audience and actor) is indeed a prerequisite to learning. Cole (1975) makes the argument that the purpose of theatre is to 'make the imaginative truth present' (p.76) which requires clear boundaries between the audience and spectator in order not to compromise what he terms 'the sacredness' of acting, that is, the special quality inherent in the art of theatre performance (Jackson 2007). According to Bennett (2002) 'when distance disappears then art does too' (p.16) and once audience participation occurs, the theatre event is no longer art and denies or severely compromises 'what is often thought to be a key ingredient of any theatre event – aesthetic distance' (Jackson 2007 p.139).

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<sup>9</sup> And in 2005 during a performance of 'Heroes' Richard Griffith told a member of the audience, whose mobile phone rang, to leave the auditorium

This could of course be seen as the equivalent of counting angels on the heads of pin - certainly in terms of forum theatre participation is seen as an activity which requires the audience to interact with the performers. As noted, this participation may vary from an audience remaining in their seats and interacting with the actors and facilitators (simultaneous dramaturgy) to taking to the stage to displace the actors to take over a role and re-direct the action (forum). Participation thus becomes synonymous with discussion and dialogue as opposed to more physical activities which might be encountered in theatre-based interventions using workshop techniques.

The difficulty with 'participative' theatre of the type advocated by Boal and others is that it does not offer an option of non-participation. For example, theatre-based interventions which use techniques from rehearsal processes cannot be effective without all the actors actively participating in the process (Ibbotson 2002); similarly participation in forum theatre is often seen as a prerequisite of the event achieving its objectives. The emphasis on active participation ignores the possibility that individuals may still engage with the event even if they do not appear to be overtly participating. Furthermore, while (active) participation is cited as the key to learning there are those who feel uncomfortable in such situations; George 2007 (cited in Taylor and Ladkin 2009) noted that participants engaged in arts-based activities 'sometimes expressed deep seated concerns to engaging in arts forms in which they felt they had limited talent' (p.67), which may result in dissonance and discomfort to the extent they are likely to feel excluded and marginalised rather than involved. It also needs to be remembered that this is theatre being performed in organisations - employees are not necessarily attending such events on a voluntary basis. As with the invocation of emotions, this raises an ethical issue as to the extent to which it is permissible to expect employees to take their participation beyond their 'comfort zones'. It is this invocation of emotion that is discussed in the next section.

### **The Emotional Dimension : Catharsis, Empathy and Identification**

Framing much of the discussion about the use of drama or theatre in organisations is the concept of the participants having an emotional or cathartic experience (Elm and Taylor 2010; Gibb 2004; Meisiek 2004; Taylor 2008) through empathising or identifying with the protagonist's situation. Much discussion has taken place about the theatre having a cathartic effect; however, the term is problematical and potentially all-encompassing (Meisiek 2004). As noted in chapter three, in the theatre studies literature the term tends to be based on the Aristotelian usage<sup>10</sup>, the concept of artificially induced emotions and the appropriate response to enacted fictions (Shepherd and Wallis 2004). Meisiek (2004) expands this definition to encompass later constructions of catharsis, on the reasonable basis that organisational theatre does not usually present classical tragedy. Thus, while he suggests that for passive-audience performances, the Aristotelian usage may be of value for exploring outcomes, active-audience 'performances' may require a different theoretical underpinning. In this context Meisiek, citing the work of Joseph Moreno, discusses catharsis as a method of fostering

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<sup>10</sup> However as Shepherd and Wallis (2004) note, 'it often comes as a surprise to note that Aristotle uses the word just once in his definition of tragedy' (p.175)

creativity, and Augusto Boal's proposition that catharsis can be used as a method of motivating action in contrast with the original (and somewhat contested) definition and usage as the relieving of emotions through identification with the on-stage characters.

Boal concurs with Brecht in respect of the concept, suggesting that the Aristotelian drama 'invites a kind of emotional orgy that inevitably wears down the spectator's capacity for action' (Babbage 2004 p.43) which resonates with Brecht's '*Verfremdungseffekt*' effect. As noted in chapter two, by destroying the technical methods which support theatrical illusion, Brecht's intention was to prevent the audience becoming emotionally involved with the play so that they can judge the performance and subject matter objectively (Esslin 1983; Hartnoll 1968).

The view Boal espoused in *Theatre of the Oppressed*, namely that empathy is a 'terrible weapon' (1979 p.113) arguing that it destroys the ability to separate illusion from reality, is critiqued by Nicholson (2005) on the grounds that it assumes that 'empathic responses are not offset by any other forms of social identification' (p.79). In other words, if the play presented enables audience members to both empathise with the situation AND that situation also induces identification, then it is likely that some critical reflection will occur. Furthermore, taking the extreme Brechtian position leads to difficulty in the enactment of forum theatre as the 'fundamental concepts of psychology regard processes of identification as the basic mechanisms by which one human being communicates with another ... without identification and empathy each person becomes irrevocably imprisoned within himself' (Esslin 1980 p.175). Thus, given that 'the declared goal of organisation theatre is to arouse emotions of organisational members' (Meisiek 2004 p 814), without empathy and identification it is difficult to see how it is possible for participants to retain interest in the action presented, particularly in the organisational context, where the audience is not attending on a voluntary basis.

Furthermore, it is this emotional engagement which provokes or encourages discussion and dialogue, both during and after forum theatre events; individuals make sense of emotional experiences through coping behaviour, looking for answers relating to that experience and 'after an emotional experience, people usually engage in telling each other about it' (Meisiek 2002a p.11). Emotion also appears to make a significant contribution to the overall enjoyment of a dramatic performance; Shöenmakers (1996 cited in Meisiek 2004) found a correlation in theatre going audiences between the intensity of negative emotions and the enjoyment of particular scenes - 'the more a spectator is emotionally involved, the more he or she had liked the play' (Meisiek 2004 p.805).

Thus, it is suggested that the dramatic representation provides a method of engaging the audience sufficiently to move from audience to participant (or active-audience). However, this representation provides another purpose – as Schreyögg (2001) suggests, 'The theatrical form is likely to get people interested in the duplication of their own reality and to get them emotionally involved in the ... process'. It is suggested that this is actually a two-way process – that identification leads to the emotional engagement which in turn enables reflection. This process and the potential for the initial

showing of a duplicated reality to enable moving from single- to double-loop learning (Argyris 1991) is discussed in the next section.

### **Observing Observations**

Schreyögg (2001) describes the concept of ‘duplicated reality’ as an observation of an observation, and argues that in organisational theatre the audience is watching their own ‘daily work routines, their conventions, deadlocked conversations between departments’ (2001) making the activity a reflexive one and leading to questioning “why do we do what we do the way we do it?” (ibid.). Schreyögg also suggests that this second order observation produces a dislocation or disruption, making the audience open to different approaches to the issues under scrutiny.

The concept of second-order observation is a useful starting point for consideration of the extent to which forum theatre does in reality create discomfort among the participants; it seems that this would require them to recognise themselves in the behaviours depicted on stage, and the concept resonates with Argyris and Schon’s (1991) argument that individual actions are guided by ‘mental maps’ and these maps, rather than the espoused theory, guide individual actions. Argyris (1990) thus proposes that reflection plays an important role in reconsidering our mental maps; forum theatre has the potential to ‘recreate’ individual maps through the depiction of alternative scenarios, which, once again, engage participants, leading them to be more open to different ways of doing things.

It is an examination of the gap between theory-in-use and espoused theory that creates the opportunities for reflection (Argyris 1990); when there is a problem individuals may look for a different strategy that will continue to work within their own governing values, goals and plans without questioning whether those underlying values are valid in the first place. Characteristics of theory-in-use Model 1 include an emphasis on rationality, suppression of negative feelings which are dealt with by protecting oneself, advocating courses of action which ‘discourage enquiry’ with consequences which include defensive relationships and little opportunity to test out ideas (Argyris, Putman and McLain Smith 1985 p.189).

Forum theatre does, in theory, work to address this by firstly providing the ‘mirror’ up the organisation and often depicting the ‘present truth’ (Cole 1975) for participants to reflect upon and secondly, providing an open or learning space in which these reflections can be discussed, thus facilitating a move to ‘Model II’ (Argyris et al.1985). ‘Model II’ can be seen to contain many of the espoused aims of organisational and forum theatre, and encompasses a number of the processes of Forum theatre, including the surfacing of conflicting views and enabling open confrontation of difficult issues increasing the likelihood of double-loop learning. However, while Argyris et al. suggest that ‘Model II’ may be readily acceptable as an espoused theory, as a theory-in-use it is rare to see it actually being employed within organisations.



Model II aims to support the move from single- to double-loop learning (Argyris 1991); single loop learning is viewed as a problem solving rather than learning exercise in which 'the error detected and corrected permits the organisation to carry on its present policies or achieve its present objectives' (ibid p.2) and in which the source of the problem is considered to be external. Double-loop learning requires a different frame of reference as outlined in Model II, where 'employees must look inward ... reflect critically on their own behaviour, identify the way they often inadvertently contribute to the organisation's problems and then change the way they act' (ibid p.4).

The underpinning philosophy of forum theatre within the organisational context (rather than the Boalian model) would appear to support double-loop learning as one aim of forum theatre is to encourage participants, through observation and participation, to reflect on their own perceptions and experiences, enabling assumptions to be challenged. However there are two issues here Firstly, by focusing on individual behaviours, the role of management in creating these behaviours is ignored. So assumptions may be made by commissioners that employees have complete control over their behaviours and such assumptions ignore the political and cultural context in which those behaviours are enacted. Secondly, much of the research undertaken by Argyris is focussed on professionals, often consultants, who have considerable autonomy in their day-to-day working life, and therefore may be in a stronger position to challenge the status quo. Forum theatre is often promoted by providers as a 'safe' method by which these 'discussable domains' can be opened up, through dialogue and discussion. However, it is questionable whether in this context it is possible for such discussions to ever be 'safe'; if consideration is not given to the underlying rather than presenting issues, socialisation processes within organisations may make employees reluctant to engage on an equal level, or voice concerns, ideas, emotions which go against the organisational norms. If issues are considered to be taboo then exposing them to the light is likely to prove a risky proposition.

Thus in this context, the areas of 'discussable domains' (Argyris and Schon 1991) by definition become even narrower, to the extent that those areas that are not considered acceptable to raise are bypassed – these domains may well be discussed informally and even be tacitly recognised but are not dealt with. These domains may be considered by participants to be outside their immediate zone of responsibility, for example, viewed as a concern of the senior management. Thus interventions become 'counterproductive because we try to solve problems without discussing the undiscussable or running afoul of organisational taboos' (Bolman and Deal 1997 p.28).

What Argyris and Schon (1996) are describing is the learning paradox where 'the actions we [the organisation] take to promote productive organisational learning actually inhibit deeper learning' (p.281). They cite the existence of organisational defences, 'a policy, practice or action that prevents the participants ... from experiencing embarrassment or threat, and at the same time prevents them from discovering the causes of the embarrassment or threat' (Argyris and Schon 1999 p. xiv) which act as a barrier to learning. Burgoyne and Jackson (1997) also suggest that many learning initiatives fail to achieve the desired changes through the refusal by senior management to address underlying

organisational issues preferring to target the presenting ‘problem’, and focusing on individual rather than organisational behaviours. Further support to this proposition is provided by Raelin (2008) who, citing Isaacs (1993), promotes the dialogic process ‘as an antidote to the ‘architecture of the invisible’—the unquestioned received wisdom and taken-for-granted processes that constrain genuine interaction’ (p.520).

This discussion of the use of second-order observation, and models of single and double-loop learning, leads into the final section of the literature review, which considers the issue of assessing organisational theatre outcomes. As Meisiek (2002 p.53) notes ‘it is necessary to consider the empirical accessibility of the effects of organisational theatre’ and suggests that short term impact can be assessed in relation to second-order observation (see also Clark 2008; Meisiek 2002(a); Schreyögg (2001); Taylor 2008), as discussed in the previous section. However, while the use of second-order observation, and double- and single-loop learning offers a way into understanding the processes at work, and perhaps evaluating the extent to which forum theatre does indeed bring about double- or even triple-loop learning, the extent to which this has been empirically tested is limited. Why this may be the case, and the extent to which it is possible to fully evaluate the impact of forum theatre interventions is addressed in the final section of this chapter.

### **Considerations for Evaluation**

The state of the literature suggests that either very few organisations have been willing to submit their experiences with artistic interventions to some form of evaluation, or that very few researchers have shown an interest in doing so. Either way, there are not many studies that report on the effects of artistic interventions in organisations. (Antal 2009 p.11)

While it is possible to review specific outcomes, such as the extent of participation and the ‘mediators’ which stimulated discussion, longer-term evaluation is more problematic. It has to be said that the literature related to evaluating learning and development generally is not particularly dynamic, with its strong focus on functionalist approaches such as Kirkpatrick’s (1960) classic four-stage model. This is not surprising given, as noted earlier in this chapter, the increasing preoccupation with learning and development being focused on supporting the organisation’s instrumental and technical objectives, with little consideration being given to longer-term developmental issues. The more critical perspectives of evaluating learning and development initiatives tend to be found in the management development literature. To some extent this is not surprising as management development and learning tends to focus on longer-term concerns, such as behavioural and attitudinal changes. As Mabey and Finch-Lees (2008) comment, the ‘the majority of research seeks to explain management development in instrumental terms and is concerned with representing the benefits in the language of accounting and economics professionals [which] tends to subjugate development activities to an over-simplified means-end calculation’ (p.10). However, this is directly transferable to the espoused

learning from forum theatre events, where there is a similar focus on behavioural changes leading to, in theory, organisational change.

Similar concerns can be found in the educational theatre discourse – Jackson (2007) notes that in theatre-in-education the preoccupation with targets and outcomes, coupled with changes to funding arrangements has led, firstly, to the marginalisation of arts in the educational curriculum and, secondly, in relation to this research a failure to take into account the potential ability of the arts to ‘develop empathy, creativity, empathetic engagement with the experience of others [and] an appreciation of the artistic form’ (p.199). Thus Jackson argues for research into students’ experiences of educational theatre to be evaluated on the basis of:

... believability, empathy, clarity of story-line, relevance to their own lives and concerns, enjoyment of the vitality of the performance ... these are the factors that weigh in their minds, rather than learning outcomes or behaviour modification. (p. 207)

Thus it is generally agreed that the extent to which it is possible to take a functionalist perspective in evaluating the ‘effectiveness’ of forum theatre interventions is problematic. Given that one of the claims of forum theatre is that it has the potential to feed into wider change beyond the individual, how can such claims be assessed and by whom? Even if the aim of a forum theatre intervention is to deliver a message, while, as Etherton and Prentki (2006) suggest, it might be relatively easy to evaluate whether the message is understood, ‘the change only occurs at the point when the message is ... acted upon’ (p.147), that is, there is a change in attitudes or, perhaps more importantly behaviour. Even when forum theatre is practised as faithfully as is possible to the Boalian original and the issues are perhaps even more pressing to individuals than those in the organisational context, the question still arises as to whether real change can occur through forum theatre. As Adrian Jackson, Artistic Director of Cardboard Citizens commented:

Ultimately the changes that might result are multiple and various, ranging from the world-shattering to the microscopic – but some days nothing might happen. This is reality – change is slow, affected by all sorts of tiny indeterminable unquantifiable factors. It is not that likely, let’s face it, that two hours of Forum Theatre is going to reverse a lifetime of homelessness ... and self-abuse – but it might have an influence, and yes, actually, occasionally, miraculously sometimes, it might be the thing that tips the balance. (Jackson 2003 cited in Burbage 2004 (email correspondence)

Furthermore, if forum theatre is genuinely open to participants addressing the issues that are important to them, then measurement will clearly be elusive - is the measurement concerned with whether or not the ‘learning outcomes’ have been met or the extent to which the participants were able to genuinely create their own ‘performance’ (Nissley et al. p.2004)? Clearly there is a tension between these two outcomes and part of this research aims to explore these potentially irreconcilable outcomes. As

Robinson (1993) comments in relation to evaluating theatre in education initiatives, 'although the objective model is linear, logical, and apparently straightforward, the type of work [which is being evaluated] is not' (p.254). Like many developmental learning programmes, the link between the programme and any behaviour changes is not always clear and given the multi-faceted nature of forum theatre events, they are unlikely to produce a 'static final outcome' (Jackson 1980 p.91).

Taylor (2003), reflecting on his play *'The Ties That Bind'*, performed as a piece of organisational theatre at an Academy of Management Conference notes:

... I would be shocked if a significant number of audience members articulated clear action plans based on what they had just seen. It seems to me to be unreasonable to expect the knowing in the gut to be quickly digested, percolate up to the head, and find a voice in action—particularly when the play does not offer any prescription; it only illustrates the issues. (p.278)

This comment seems pertinent for two reasons. Firstly, it suggests that, as discussed previously, theatre has the potential to provide an emotional reaction, which can be difficult to articulate (the knowing in the gut) until reflected upon and, secondly, theatre here is not offering a prescription or message, it is attempting to portray a set of issues in the dramatic form through a narrative, leaving the audience to decide how to interpret the outcome. So is this simply a rather long-winded way of saying the forum theatre interventions are impossible to evaluate in any meaningful way and therefore should not be attempted? I would suggest not necessarily, rather that until there is clarity about what is the purpose of such events and how such events are constructed by the stakeholders, it is more beneficial to consider the actual impact of an event, that is, how do the participants perceive these events in terms of their value, to what extent has there been a change in attitudes or behaviour and what, if any, further actions were taken by the participants after the event, or by commissioners in terms of any follow-up activities? Clearly this is an evaluation of sorts, but it is not intended to 'measure' the effectiveness of such events, rather it provides further understanding of the relationship between the context, method and outcomes (Eherton and Prentki 2006).

Kamoche's (2000) comments, in relation to management development initiatives, that the difficulty in establishing a link between such initiatives and organisational performance, 'has led to some to accept the value of management training and development as an act of faith' (p.748). The lack of robust reviews of forum theatre interventions might lead to the conclusion that the commissioning of forum theatre could also be an 'act of faith' and leads to the question as to what commissioners may be expecting from these interventions. It should be noted, that where arts-based initiatives are sponsored there is usually a pressure from the funders for initiatives to be formally evaluated (Ackroyd 2007). Such evaluations, broadly speaking, fall into two categories; firstly, those which are independently commissioned, usually carried out by academics with expertise in the area. These reports tend to use multi-methods, obtaining quantitative and qualitative data through surveys, observations and

interviews, from all the stakeholders (practitioners, project managers, participants). While not subject to peer review, such reports provide an objective review and evaluation of arts-based interventions (see for example, Greatbatch et al. 2005; Turner et al. 2004). The second category of evaluation are generally written by sponsors with a vested interest in a positive outcomes, and tend to provide highly partial accounts, often relying on case studies with limited provision of empirical data (see Buswick et al. 2004). It is interesting to note that the latter reports are generally more accessible, as are the practitioner accounts in journals such as *People Management*, which, as noted in chapter one, tend to provide glowing accounts, with little or no critical analysis.

## Conclusion

This chapter explored the processes of forum theatre as enacted in organisations and focused on the event or performance, identifying a number of features which purport to enable the realisation of the espoused objectives of these events. These include a dramatic representation, designed to engage the audience in order to stimulate active audience participation and an emphasis on discussion (not solutions) with the aim of supporting a pluri-vocal, non-hierarchical learning space. Unsurprisingly, given that much of applied theatre draws on Boal for its inception and delivery, these resonate not only with the applied and educational theatre literature but also with the learning literature particularly in relation to the argument that increasingly institutionalised and unitarist approaches to learning and development has led to the need for a reappraisal of how learning and development initiatives are conceived and implemented to enable a more pluri-vocal perspective.

The first section explored the theme of 'space' which resonates with both the performance studies and learning literature and, in relation to forum theatre, encompasses three interrelated concepts – the literal performance space and the relationship between the actors and the audience (Bennett 2002; McAuley 1997), the liminal space, a social space that is 'betwixt and between the original positions arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremony' (Turner, 1982 p.95) and the learning space (Coopey 2002; Fulop and Rifkin 1997). It is argued that these three dimensions of spaces are linked; the physical performance space impacts on the extent to which both a 'learning space' and a 'liminal space' can be realised.

Embedded in this discussion is a consideration of the extent to which it is possible to also realise the 'suspension of hierarchy' in such events. 'Theatre is a space of possibilities, a space of the possible' (Steyaert et al. 2006) but the creation of such spaces within organisations is clearly problematical. Burgoyne and Jackson make the point that arenas or open learning spaces can be managed in order to make such spaces work by 'increasing the chances that important differences are aired' (1997 p.61) but acknowledges the tension implicit in imposing a structure. This has implications for the role of the facilitator in forum theatre events, both in terms of enabling 'learning spaces' to be created and in terms of supporting open-ended discussions, the outcomes of which might not necessarily be

anticipated or present difficulties for senior managers who may prefer certain issues not to be discussed.

The purpose of the 'narratives' is to entertain and engage the audience, enabling them to identify with the characters and be sufficiently engaged to embark on discussion of the issues. Forum theatre supports a dialogical approach to learning, in which different ideas are discussed within a specific context with the aim of persuading others to follow this approach (Jackson 2007). Thus it is the collective (rather than individual) experience which triggers dialogue among the participants through the sharing of a particular experience and, secondly, the need for emotional engagement (be it negative or positive as discussed previously). While there are conflicting positions taken with regard to emotional engagement, the aim of the enacted part of forum theatre is to enable participants to identify with the protagonist and, by empathising with their situation, reflect on how this enactment resonates with their own behaviours. There is some empirical support for this proposition – in a discussion of the impact of two plays presented at different Academy of Management Conferences (Elm and Taylor 2010) the play that seemed to produce the most reaction was the one which was closest to the academy members' own experiences.

This discussion led to an exploration of the meaning of participation and suggests that, while audience participation appears as a given in forum theatre, in reality the concept is problematic. Thus in live theatre an audience is viewed as being a participant in the event, even though their chief activity is to sit and observe; in forum theatre there has been criticism that in the organisational context real participation can only occur if the audience is enabled or encouraged to come up on stage and interact directly with the actors. However, Cole (1975) argues that the purpose of theatre is to 'make the imaginative truth present' (p.76) which requires clear boundaries between the audience and spectator in order not to compromise what he terms 'the sacredness' of acting, that is the special quality inherent in the art of theatre performance (Jackson 2007). According to Bennett (1992) 'when distant disappears then art does too' (p.16) and once audience participation occurs, the theatre event is no longer art and denies, or at least severely compromises, 'what is often thought to be a key ingredient of any theatre event – aesthetic distance' (Jackson 2007 p.139). Thus the need for the type of on-stage participation advocated by forum theatre literature is questionable as it is nevertheless possible for interaction and discussion to be enabled through the theatre medium and the use of simultaneous dramaturgy rather than forum (that is, participants coming up on stage) does not necessarily invalidate or compromise the potential for unanticipated outcomes.

It is argued that it is the focus on emergent and unanticipated outcomes that makes formal evaluation of such events problematical. Thus the final section of this chapter explored the issue of evaluating or measuring whether or the espoused outcomes are met. As Schreyögg (2001) notes:

Questions of purpose and effects are mostly asked from a causal point of view. In this view theatrical performance is thought of as a stimulus which is supposed to bring about a foreseeable

response. This is however too simple a perspective ... (p.9).

Schreyögg (2001) argues that 'to understand the effects of theatre we have to include conceptually the audience perspective .... therefore the ultimate question is no longer how to design the stimulus but rather how the audience handles the confrontation and provocation the theatrical performance brings to them' (p.10). Here the organisational and performance/theatre studies literature merge as Jackson (2007) similarly declares 'any evaluation of [theatre-in-education programmes] has to take account of the way young people actually experience theatre' (p.207). This approach is underpinned by constructivist approaches to evaluation in which knowledge and competency is 'less of an objective commodity and a more fluid consequence, naturally arising from, contributing to and being shaped by social practices' (Mabey and Finch-Lees 2008 p.79) and informs the approach taken in this research to considering the impact of forum theatre events.

Having provided the context and justification for undertaking research into the practice of forum theatre in organisational settings, the next chapter outlines the research design, providing a brief summary of the themes arising from the literature review, as well as reviewing previous empirical research on forum theatre, which, in turn, leads to a statement of the aims and objectives of this research. It then provides an account of the methodology and methods used to support the research aims and objectives, including the initial epistemological and ontological considerations, the design of the research, data collection and data analysis.

# CHAPTER 5

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

#### Introduction

This chapter outlines the approach taken in relation to designing and carrying out the research. It starts with a brief summary of previous empirical research into forum theatre, before setting out the research aims and objectives. The epistemological and ontological considerations which informed the research design are then outlined, followed by a practical account of the data collection process, primarily semi-structured interviews and observation, including sampling, preparation and carrying out the interviews and observations. Template analysis was employed to enable comparisons between the various data sets. Data was initially coded using *a priori* or constructed codes, before undertaking further analysis in which *in vivo* or emergent codes were developed thus enabling the development of relationships between the various data categories. The templates, which were developed as a result of the analysis, show how the interpretation of the data led to the development of themes through which the data could be presented.

#### Forum Theatre: Empirical Research

Empirical reviews of forum theatre in organisations are limited. The two most thorough examinations are provided by Clark and Mangham (2004a) and Meisiek and Barry (2007) with a third more limited one offered by Gibb (2004). Espoused theory suggests that forum theatre aims to question ‘the assumptions and taken for granted embodied in both theory and practice ... and working towards an emancipatory ideal – the realisations of a more just society based on fairness and democracy’ (Reynolds 1999 p.173). However, in all the cases in the research cited the focus appeared to be on the presenting rather than underlying structural issues, in Clark and Mangham’s terms, second-order issues rather than first-order structural change. Gibb’s findings support Clark and Mangham’s critique, particularly in relation to underlying issues being raised but not addressed. Clark and Mangham (2004a) compare the views of the actors who ‘repeatedly characterized what they had just enacted as a piece of forum theatre according to the principles developed by Augusto Boal’ (p. 843) with their own observations which led them to the conclusion that there was a considerable gap between the espoused and actual processes and outcomes. Their view of forum theatre as being ‘Boal-lite’ is supported by Meisiek and Barry (2007) who comment that ‘present forms of organisational theatre cannot deliver on Boal’s normative expectations for political theatre and worker liberation’ (p.1807).

Thus, while this form of organisational intervention may aim to provide a focus by which potentially difficult organisational issues may be explored and sometimes resolved through discussion (Meisiek



and Barry 2007), it is generally agreed that it is the techniques that are followed not the underpinning philosophy of Boal (see Clark and Mangham 2004a; Meisiek and Barry 2007; Nissley et al. 2004). Furthermore, Clark and Mangham argue that splitting the philosophy of Boal from the activity of forum theatre as practised by theatre consultants dilutes the process to the extent to which it become meaningless when transferred to an organisational setting (Clark and Mangham 2004a). Clark and Mangham particularly focus on the concern that the issues explored in organisational theatre performances are defined by management rather than employees, and argue that proponents of this method ignore the political realities of organisational life.

If new understanding is to be brought by allowing audience members to step back and take a look at what they are doing, more attention needs to be given to the complexity, irony, politics and power struggles that characterise organisations (2004a p.849)

However, other commentators (Larsen 2005; Meisiek and Barry 2007) suggest that using the techniques of forum theatre does offer value for organisations. Larsen (2005) argues that the Boalian methodology can be adapted for the organisational context; he suggests that rather than viewing conflict as a weapon for ‘freeing the oppressed’ (Darso 2004 p.87) the concept of ‘creative dialogue’, where conflict is used ‘as a potential for change through dialogue’ (Larsen 2005), better sums up the process. This would suggest that while forum theatre interventions are unlikely to lead to the type of change proposed by Boal, they nevertheless have the potential to provide a more democratic approach to learning in organisations by facilitating cross-organisational discussion and debate and freeing up participants by opening up spaces for such discussions. However, it is also worth noting that Ibbotson, a theatre practitioner and writer, comments that forum theatre ‘can be a very effective and powerful tool’<sup>11</sup> (2009 p.116) but it is only of value if it addresses the ‘true unsayables’ (ibid.).

However, while each of these studies has provided valuable insights which inform this research, in terms of the data that is presented, the stakeholder perspectives have not been fully explored. Thus Meisiek and Barry’s (2007) longitudinal study provides a detailed account of the outcomes from the participants’ and managers’ perspective but does not fully explore how their perspective fits with that of the theatre consultancy. Clark and Mangham’s review is primarily based on extensive observation; while the actors’ perspective is cited (rather than reported verbatim), first-hand accounts of the participant perspective are not provided. Similarly, Gibb’s (2004) account of a forum theatre event is based on his own observations and discussions with the facilitators; again first-hand accounts from the participants are not included. This is not uncommon in human resource management research in organisations, and there may have been difficulties accessing employees; nevertheless given the emphasis on participant voice in forum theatre, it is concerning that these are the voices least heard in such research.

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<sup>11</sup> It is interesting that Ibbotson too uses the term ‘tool’ here which implies the very instrumental approach which he then moves on to reject.

To summarise, the empirical research to date presents a valuable, albeit fragmented, exploration of forum theatre but, to date, has not fully explored the purposes of forum theatre, from the practitioners' and commissioners' perspective. Nor has previous research examined the extent to which the features of forum theatre, as set out in Figure 4.1 (p.42), support the espoused purposes. Finally, with the exception of Meisiek and Barry (2007), there is lack of a systematic exploration of the impact of forum theatre events; the next section sets out the aims and objectives of this research, which intends to address the above gaps in the current research.

## **Research Aims and Objectives**

The aim of the research is to explore forum theatre from the perspectives of the stakeholders and compare the espoused theory of theatre-based interventions versus the theory-in-use between the practitioners and commissioners and explore the similarities and differences. As noted in the introductory chapter, Clark (2008) offers a number of avenues for research into theatre-based practices in organisations. From the commissioning perspective, he argues for a need to explore the role of the commissioner in more depth. From the audience perspective, there is a need to consider the role of the audience during an event, as well their reactions during the 'performance' and the after-effects of theatre-based interventions.

Furthermore, there has been limited empirical research into the practitioner perspective, whether they be project managers responsible for promoting and developing events, or the actors/facilitators responsible for delivering the event. Like the audience, they have roles to play – how are those roles perceived and how does this effect the espoused aims? How do practitioners construct forum theatre and what models do they hold? To what extent are these models in line with those of the commissioners and audience/participants? What understanding do commissioners have of forum theatre and its antecedents, what outcomes are they expecting and indeed how radical do they want the outcomes to be? Thus this research aims to provide a more in-depth understanding of forum theatre processes by going beyond single case studies and exploring the perspectives of a range of providers, commissioners and participants, thus moving away from the espoused theory, as suggested in the organisational studies literature to a more practice-based 'theory-in-use'.

Thus the overall aim of the research is to compare the espoused theory of theatre-based interventions versus the theory-in-use and to establish the extent to which the providers', commissioners' and participants' perspectives (concerning purpose, processes and outcomes) are in alignment. In order to address this question the supporting research objectives are as follows:

1. To explore how forum theatre is constructed and to identify what are the espoused aims and objectives from the perspective of the consultants and commissioners;

2. To identify the components of forum theatre and explore the extent to which the process (or components of the process) supports or hinders the perceived purpose from the perspective of the stakeholders;
3. To explore the impact of forum theatre from an organisational and individual perspective.

Thus, the review of the literature raised a number of questions relating to the construction, implementation, impact and evaluation of organisational and forum theatre. This chapter considers the ontological and epistemological issues related to this research, provides background information about the organisational context for the study and explores the rationale for selecting qualitative data methods to support the research objectives. The second part of the chapter gives an account of the data collection and analysis process, a process which in turn informed the structure for the presentation of the findings.

## **Ontological and Epistemological Considerations**

Research needs to be framed within the appropriate epistemological and ontological framework. What we believe our knowledge to be is shaped by what we perceive as reality and the nature and process of research is shaped by these beliefs and individual perceptions of reality. The philosophy of research centres on the concepts of epistemology and ontology and relates to questions about the nature of evidence. Epistemology is concerned with philosophical claims about ‘the way in which the world is known to us and involves issues about the nature of knowledge itself ... that is what we count as facts’ (Hughes 1990 p.5). Thus the epistemological position requires the researcher to consider the relationship between the researcher and researched (Collis and Hussey 2009).

Furthermore there is a need to be aware of how we see the world, or what we see or accept as reality – our ontological assumptions. What we believe our knowledge to be is shaped by what we perceive as reality, that is ‘whether you consider the world is objective and external to the researcher or socially constructed and only understood by examining the perceptions of the human actors’ (Collis and Hussey 2009 p.48). The nature and process of research are shaped both by these beliefs and the individual researcher’s own perceptions of reality.

The nature of the area of research and the research questions lends themselves to an interpretive epistemology. The open-ended nature of theatre-based interventions, the features of such interventions, - for example, ‘learning spaces’, shared meanings, cathartic effects – are by their nature ambiguous concepts and problematic to operationalise. Furthermore I am not undertaking an evaluation of theatre-based interventions, rather I am interested in the meanings and interpretations of the stakeholders to reach a better understanding of the underlying philosophies of these approaches in relation to learning and organisational change, and the extent to which these philosophies are carried forward into the event itself.

Given that the research aims to explore the interpretation by the stakeholders of theatre-based approaches, rather than an evaluation of their effectiveness, the approach adopted was that of social constructivism. Constructivism, or the making of meaning (Crotty 1998), takes the position that “all knowledge and therefore all meaningful reality ... is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p.42). While constructivism has been interpreted in a number of ways, I take Czarniawska’s (2001) view that meaning and knowledge are constructed, not ‘found’ and that meanings ‘are constructed in concrete places at specific times’ (p.254). Thus the research was underpinned by an interpretivist epistemology which argues social and natural sciences are fundamentally different in subject matter and that positivism does not allow for the concept of human agency; such an approach maintains that all human action is meaningful and emphasises ‘the contribution of human subjectivity or intention without sacrificing the objectivity of knowledge’ (Schwandt cited in Crotty 1998 p.67). Research which takes this perspective is not only providing a description of other people’s interpretations, but involves analysing those interpretations and placing them within the appropriate theoretical framework (Bryman 2004).

This approach not only relates to my own beliefs but fits the nature of the activities being studied. Public and organisational theatre comprises of actors and audience working together to co-create meaning from either scripted or improvised presentations. The perceptions of the efficacy and outcomes of theatre ‘performances’, whether practised in public or in organisations, will depend on interpretations from a range of stakeholders, including the writer, director, actors, and audiences.

However, while the ontology of this research is related to my own beliefs that reality is created through the process of interactions between people and their world, it is not committed to the extreme position that everything is relative - combining an epistemological and ontological subjectivism has the potential to lead to a ‘postmodernist cul-de-sac’ (Lewis and Keleman 2002 p.257). Thus the constructivist approach is tempered somewhat by drawing on Johnson and Duberley’s (2003) proposition that a subjective or interpretive epistemology can be combined with a realist ontology. Thus the accounts gathered through the data collection process are not intended to provide one ‘reality’, nor are participants’ constructions treated as right or wrong, true or false. Instead, the accounts are seen as individuals’ constructions of their experiences, grounded in their own experiences and beliefs, at a particular moment in time.

## **Method and Procedures**

Many research findings start with an observation, and, as Banister et al. (1994) note, ‘we are always forming hypothesis, making inferences and trying to impose meaning on our social world’ (p.17). As noted in the introduction, observing and being involved in a number of different types of drama and theatre-based organisational interventions led me to want to investigate these activities in more depth,

which in turn led me to attend my first forum theatre event, albeit as a participant and as a potential commissioner rather than researcher.

The underpinning epistemological and ontological perspectives led me to undertake a qualitative approach to data collection. Inherently multi-method in its focus (Flick 2009), qualitative data collection involves a variety of different methods, including case studies, observation, narrative and discourse analysis and participative enquiry (Denzin and Lincoln 2003). Each method offers a different view of the issues under study, with the researcher acting as an '*interpretive bricoleur*' (Denzin and Lincoln 2003 p.5), collecting and piecing together a set of representations. Furthermore, the data itself can be captured in a range of different forms (Coffey and Atkinson 1996), as is the case in the data gathered for this research, which draws on tender documents, observations, group and individual interviews, field notes and 'in situ' conversations. As will be discussed later, the majority of the data for this research was collected through semi-structured interviews, supported by observation of events and a rehearsal, together with documentary sources, which included tender documents plus a scrutiny of theatre-based consultancies' websites.

### **Observation**

I had access to five forum theatre (or described as forum theatre) events, three in-situ, (that is, 'real' events), and for two of the programmes I was able to attend several different sessions. The other two events were promotional or showcase events, designed to market the programmes to a range of organisations.

For two of the programmes I firstly attended as a genuine participant rather than an observer; while I did take notes, this was mainly from my perspective as an audience member and how I felt about the event as a participant in a learning activity. Attending as a participant meant that when I returned to observe in a more structured way I was able focus on the process as I was already familiar with the content of the events. Thus the subsequent observations were in the form of structured or systematic observations (Bryman and Bell 2007), the purpose being to view at first-hand how the events were framed by the facilitators and to observe the interactions between participants and facilitators and actors.

### **Semi-structured Interviews**

The interview is the most widely used method of collecting qualitative data being 'highly flexible, used almost anywhere and is capable of producing data of great depth (King 1994 p.14). The qualitative research interview is used to see the topic from the perspective of the interviewee – one of the key differences between inductive and deductive research. In deductive research the researcher draws on the literature and defines the boundaries for the responses whereas inductive research enables the participant to a greater or lesser extent to set the boundaries.

The choice of undertaking semi-structured interviews was made fairly early on in the research process. 'Interviewing is a concern with subjective meanings – the meaning the participants accord to the topic of the interview' (Burman 1994 p.50). They are particularly of value when exploring complex phenomena as the method accommodates 'holding inconsistent, contradictory views (which) are not necessarily a function of faulty reasoning, but rather may be a reflection of the real contradictions and complexities' (ibid. p.50) of the research topic. Given that the research focuses on how the stakeholders in forum theatre events construct the experience, coupled with the limited amount of empirical data available, this method supported both the nature of the research problem and the underlying epistemological and ontological considerations.

Interviews, of course, vary in their method according to the intention of the interviewer. Structured interviewing tends to support a quantitative approach in which the boundaries are clearly set by the researcher and are akin to a questionnaire/survey approach (Burman 1994). In structured interviews the questions are pre-defined with a limited set of categories defined by the researcher and the interviewee becomes a 'subject' being controlled by the researcher. This was inappropriate given the lack of previous empirical research on which a survey could be built and the difficulties of operationalising forum theatre processes. I wanted to explore with the interviewees how this activity was constructed and compare and contrast the potential contradictions in approaches. This does not mean that I wished to simply turn on my tape recorder and ask the interviewees to talk about forum theatre. Given that I had specific research objectives, (as stated on page 64 in this chapter), it would have been 'disingenuous ... to refuse to acknowledge prior expectations of agendas' (Burman 1994 p.50). Furthermore an unstructured approach can lead to the researcher failing to use an appropriate framework to provide a focus or structure for the research. Burman appears to be highly critical of unstructured interviews whereas Bryman and Bell (2007) take a more open-minded stance and their comparison of unstructured and semi-structured interviews suggests there is considerable overlap between the two types of interview. Thus while semi-structured interviews offered a middle way which enabled me to openly acknowledge that I had 'prior expectations and agendas' (Burman 1994), I nevertheless wanted to retain a high degree of flexibility. Flexibility is one of the main features of both semi-structured and unstructured interviews and while I tended towards the more semi-structured approach as I was aiming to test out some of the specific propositions from the literature I was relaxed about 'responding to the direction in which interviewees take the interview' (Bryman and Bell 2007 p.342) to explore unanticipated issues. Furthermore the semi-structured approach enabled me to compare different perspectives through having a similar interview framework for each set of participants.

Another feature of qualitative data is the inclusion of the researcher in the research process (Flick 2009), and the subjectivities of the researcher may include 'their actions and observations in the field, their impressions, irritations, feelings and so on' (p.6) which need to be specifically acknowledged as part of the research process. Thus interviewing is not just a data collecting exercise but 'active interactions between two (or more) people leading to contextually negotiated results' (Fontana and

Frey 2003 p.62). The concept of the 'active interview' assumes data collection as a two-way process enabling access to the stories by means of which people construct their particular world (Holstein and Gubrium 2004) and the active interviewer can also, through being part of the construction, shape the outcome. Thus, while I aimed to control the interview through the employment of appropriate interviewing skills (active listening, reflecting, summarising), it was possible to combine the strengths of both semi-structured and unstructured approaches.

## The Research Context

This research is about forum theatre, and therefore the focus of the research needed to be grounded within organisations or individuals that provide or had commissioned forum theatre events. The primary method of data collection was individual and group semi-structured interviews with providers, commissioners and participants, the majority of which were undertaken face-to-face, although I also undertook three telephone interviews. The interviews were supplemented by observing five programmes, two of which were ongoing, as well as a rehearsal for another programme. This data was further supported by access to tender documents and scripts and in addition a number of consultancy websites were scrutinised to consider the claims made by the companies in their advertising material and compare with the claims made by project managers.

Initially I considered focusing specifically on two or more theatre consultancy programmes and interviewing all those involved with the projects including directors, actors, commissioners and participants, but difficulty with accessing commissioners and participants for several programmes led me to review this approach. As noted previously previous studies have been located within one specific event or case (Clark and Mangham 2004a&b; Gibb 2004; Meisiek and Barry 2007); thus in line with Clark's (2008) proposal that organisational theatre research needs to move beyond single case studies, I observed four different programmes, three of which gave me access to all the stakeholders, and also undertook a number of 'one-off' interviews with project managers<sup>12</sup>, actors and commissioners which were not linked to any specific events (see Table 5.1 p.73).

Widening the scope of the research offered the potential for greater generalisability; my approach relates to Alvesson and Kärreman's (2000) concept of mesa-discourse where the researcher is still relatively attuned to the context of language use but is also interested in exploring broader patterns and themes, 'going beyond the details of the text and generalizing to similar local contexts' (p.1113). I was interested in individual perspectives and how the various participants in such events constructed the use of forum theatre across a relatively wide spectrum. However generalising from qualitative data needs to be approached with caution. While it is possible to argue that if similar views emerged across the groups who had been involved in or had experience of forum theatre, there is the potential to be able to

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<sup>12</sup> To simplify reporting on the analysis I entitled individuals with responsibility for managing all or part of the process, 'Project Managers'. This includes both Company Directors and those running a project who may or may not be employees of the providing organization.. The term 'practitioners' is used when referring to both project managers and actors/facilitators.

generalise from the individual to the collective, it is worth bearing in mind that ‘extrapolation better captures the typical procedure in qualitative research’ (Alasuutari 1995 cited in Silverman 2010 p.150).

### **Sampling**

I recognised at an early stage that as I did not work in the theatre consultancy sector, my choice of participants for the study was likely to be somewhat opportunistic, that is, would be dependent on a number of different factors such as willingness of organisations and individuals to take part and accessibility of events. However, accessibility and convenience are not sufficient grounds for selecting a sample (Silverman 2010) and I took a purposive approach to sampling, seeking out ‘groups, settings and individuals where ... the processes being studied are most likely to occur’ (Denzin and Lincoln 1994 p.202). My starting point for data collection was the theatre consultancies, as it became apparent early in the research that this would be the most effective route to accessing the other stakeholders.

My criteria for selecting theatre consultancies were that they used the term ‘forum theatre’ in promoting their services and, for practical reasons, were based in London and the South-East. In addition, to narrow the field I chose companies that only offered theatre-based interventions (including forum theatre), rather than general consultancy or training activities, in order to ensure that there was a clear focus on theatre-based interventions. My starting point was attending two showcase events where the consultancies were inviting possible commissioners to view their work (though in such cases I informed the company I would like to attend for research rather than commissioning purposes). This enabled me to access two long-term programmes and gave me access to the actors/facilitators involved with the programmes plus the delegates. Through previous contacts, including a company with whom I had worked with in the past, Arts and Business UK and contacting theatre-based consultancies directly, I was able to interview a further four project managers, totalling six in all. The following section provides further details of the participants in the research.

### ***Project Managers***

All the project managers interviewed used what they described as forum theatre as part of their repertoire; other activities included providing actors for training workshops to carry out individual role plays and rehearsal based workshops to develop, for example, presentational skills. All had originally started working in the professional theatre, the majority being formally trained (Drama degree, RADA, LAMDA, Central School of Speech and Drama) in theatre skills, either acting or directing.

All the project managers had started working in the field of organisational theatre in the late 1980s or early 1990s, and had made a deliberate choice to move from public to organisational theatre work, in most cases initially as a supplement to ‘professional’ acting, in order to earn money through using their skills while ‘resting’ from the professional theatre. The majority had started by doing role play work for friends and/or organisations; while several referred to ‘role playing’ as ‘easy money’ this was



probably because it was easier for them doing work that used their theatre skills rather than undertaking the traditional 'resting' work such as employment in call centres or restaurant work. This experience, in several cases, led to a deliberate decision to focus on this area of work, often coinciding with a change in lifestyle, such as starting a family, which resulted in a desire to find a more secure way of earning their living.

Four out of the six project managers were running or had recently run their own companies and three had a number of permanent employees (finance, marketing, project management); all employed the actors (and sometimes the facilitators) on a freelance basis. The remaining two worked on a freelance basis with no permanent staff. One undertook project management on behalf of a large providing company.

### ***Actors / Facilitators***

One of the features of this research was the interviews with the actors/facilitators; While previous empirical studies of organisational and forum theatre events (see Clark and Mangham 2004a; Gibb 2004; Meisiek and Barry 2007) refer to discussions with the actors as part of the research, the data is reported in third party terms rather than being provided as primary data. Actors are key stakeholders in forum theatre interventions and it was important that their perspective was included in the research. In practice obtaining access to the actors/facilitators was challenging because of their work schedules; if they were not required for the whole day by the theatre consultancy, they had other commitments, such as evening theatre work or auditions. They were consequently interviewed during their often brief lunch hours. Because of these restrictions in terms of time, the majority of these interviews were held in small groups.

### ***Commissioners***

Gaining access to commissioners proved to be problematic. The majority of the directors of the theatre-based consultancies I approached were interested in the research and more than willing to be interviewed, but the scope of the access to commissioners and participants was limited to what their clients were willing to provide. While I was able to interview the commissioners for two of the programmes I observed, it was difficult to access other commissioners, and I made use of word of mouth and the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development. Again, I looked for people who had commissioned forum theatre specifically (or some form of forum theatre); as a result I was able to interview seven commissioners, five who had commissioned directly on behalf of their organisations and two consultants who regularly used specific theatre groups to support their training and development activities. It should be noted that two of the commissioners interviewed had used companies whose work I had observed, providing different perspectives of those consultancies.

### ***Event Participants***

As with the consultants, participants were challenging to access as such access depended on the agreement of the organisation. One project manager interviewed previously had indicated that talking to private sector organisations would be difficult, as they appeared to be more reluctant than the public sector to divulge that they were using theatre-based interventions. This proved to be the case as all the event participants interviewed came from the public sector. Three separate groups of staff were interviewed from across health, education and council workers.

The first set of group interviews were with employees of a London borough, and were commissioned by the Human Resources Director who wanted a qualitative evaluation of a forum theatre event, but was happy for me to use my own interview schedule. The groups were self-selecting; employees who had attended the programme were emailed to ask if they would like to take part and six group interviews were held over a three-day period in November 2006. The second programme took place in an educational setting during 2007 and 2008 and I was able to interview ten delegates on a one-to-one basis. Participants were selected on the basis of firstly willingness to be interviewed, but I also ensured that they had different work roles and were mixed in terms of gender, ethnicity and age. The third programme was for general practitioners in an NHS trust and I undertook telephone interviews with two of the participants.

The group interviews with participants and actors lasted an hour (which had been agreed with the groups beforehand), individual interviews with participants ranged from 25 to 45 minutes – unsurprisingly they varied in accordance with the level of interest and engagement by the participants in the events. The project manager interviews ranged from an hour to ninety minutes – as will be discussed when reviewing the interview process, this group was certainly the most articulate and appeared to relish the opportunity to discuss their work.

Thus by September 2009 I had observed nine performances or events delivered by three theatre consultancies across five organisations, and interviewed, either through group interviews or on a one-to-one basis, 59 individuals who had participated in some form of forum theatre, broken down as follows:

**Table 5.1 Data Collection Summary**

<b>Events:</b>	<b>Collected from:</b>	<b>Type of data:</b>	<b>Numbers</b>
<b>Forum Theatre Consultancy 1</b>	Performances	Observation	3
	Project Managers	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	1
	Actors/Facilitators	Interview ( <i>Group (x1)</i> )	3
	Participants	Interview ( <i>Group (x6)</i> )	25
	Commissioners <sup>13</sup>	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	1
<b>Forum Theatre Consultancy 2</b>	Performances	Observation	3
	Rehearsal <sup>14</sup>	Observation	1
	Project Managers	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	1
	Commissioners	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	2
	Actors/Facilitators	Interview ( <i>Group (x2)</i> )	5
	Participants	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	10
<b>Forum Theatre Consultancy 2a</b>	Performances	Observation	1
	Commissioners	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	1
	Actors/Facilitators	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	1
	Participants	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	2
<b>Forum Theatre Consultancy 3</b>	Performances	Observation	1
	Commissioners	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	1
<b>Forum Theatre Consultancy 4</b>	Performances	Observation	1
<b>Other</b>	Project Managers	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	4
	Commissioners	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	2
	Actors/Facilitators	Interview ( <i>One-to-one</i> )	1

### **Recording the Interviews**

All interviews were recorded and transcribed prior to analysis. While I found that transcribing interviews myself to be a useful exercise as the process of listening and writing enabled some early analysis as I became more familiar the themes being explored, in practice this was not always possible due to time limitations. Professional transcribers transcribed all the group interviews and the majority of project manager and actor/facilitator interviews. Focus groups and group interviews are notoriously

<sup>13</sup> The commissioner in this case had commissioned the same company but for a different organisation – these events were not observed but the model was similar.

<sup>14</sup> This was a rehearsal for a different event from the ones I observed, but consultancy worked to an identical model

time-consuming to transcribe (Bryman and Bell 2007) plus, in one case, the transcription costs were covered by the organisation. Interviews with project managers and actors tended to produce long and very detailed accounts, which again would have been too time-consuming to transcribe myself.

Transcription was done on an intelligent verbatim basis, using conventional orthography and punctuation. When using a transcriber, after the tapes had been returned I listened to them several times with the transcript – firstly to check any incorrect or indistinct part of the transcription and, secondly, to make notes of my initial impressions and emerging themes. While I did not request that intonation be transcribed, I also noted where particular emphasis was made or humour was being used. Pauses were also noted where the interviewee gave particular thought to a question or was particularly hesitant or tentative in their responses.

## **Ethical Considerations**

As qualitative research ‘inevitably involves contact with human subjects in the “field”, ethical problems are not usually far away’ (Silverman 2010 p.152). While ethical considerations will vary across the subject disciplines, general principles can be agreed across the various codes of practice, most prominent of which are:

- Obtaining informed consent
- Protection of research participants (including confidentiality and anonymity)
- Not doing harm to participants
- Voluntary participation and the right to withdraw
- Assessment of potential benefits and risks to participants

(King and Horrocks 2010; Silverman 2010)

The three principles considered to be of most relevance to this research - informed consent, protection of participants and harm to participants - are considered in detail below.

### **Informed Consent**

... participants must normally be informed fully about the purpose, methods and intended possible uses of the research, what their participation in the research entails and what risks, if any, are involved (Economic and Social Research Council 2010).

Informed consent appears to be a relatively straightforward concept – ‘all elements of the research need to be fully disclosed .... only when prospective participants are fully informed in advance are they in a position to give informed consent’ (Tindall, 1994 p.153). However for this research, and indeed any qualitative research, the term implies that it is possible to state what the outcomes of research are going to be. This may be easier to state when undertaking quantitative research since the researcher is setting the boundaries. However, with more open-ended research in which at least some of the findings will

emerge from the data rather than be driven by an initial theory, it is not always clear what the outcome of the research will be. For example, in the case of this research, participant evaluations might not be as favourable as the providers or commissioners might wish or expect. Thus, while acknowledging that full disclosure was not practical, a number of steps were taken so that informed consent was given by participants as far as logistically possible.

All interviewees were given full information on the nature of the research and how the data collected would be used, although this was handled in slightly different ways according to what access I had to the participants prior to the interview. Thus interviews with commissioners and project managers were organised by me directly and I was therefore able to send an information sheet at the time of requesting access (Appendix 7). When interviews were arranged either through the theatre consultancies (as was the case with the actors/facilitators) or the commissioning organisations (as with the event participants), participants were verbally briefed; in addition consent forms were issued explaining the aim of the research, how the data would be used and stating that participants had the right to opt out of the interviews at any stage of the interview. This was of particular importance for the event participants as, to help with access, I had offered the commissioning organisations an evaluation report and it was important that the interviewees were aware that the data could be used in this way, albeit all data was presented anonymously. Similarly, the actor/facilitators were made aware that their directors were interested in the research and had requested a copy of the final submission of the thesis.

I also had to consider informed consent when I undertook observation of theatre performances. The actors and facilitators were informed of my presence which caused no difficulties and for smaller events (less than 20 attendees) I was introduced to the participants, as it was obvious there was an outsider attending. However, some of the events observed had audiences of up to 100, making overt observation impractical. However these were 'theatre' events taking place in a public space and it did not feel inappropriate given that I was reporting on what might be termed 'audience reactions' as a whole rather than specific or individual conversations.

### **Anonymity and Confidentiality**

Social researchers should take appropriate measures to prevent their data from being published or otherwise released in a form that would allow any subject's identity to be disclosed or inferred ... [however] either the use of subject pseudonyms nor anonymity alone is any guarantee of confidentiality (Social Research Association 2003)

It should be noted that confidentiality and anonymity are not one and the same thing. Anonymity is defined as 'any condition in which one's identity is not known to others', whereas confidentiality is 'having the characteristic of being kept secret, an intimacy of knowledge, shared by a few who do not divulge it to others' (Penguin Dictionary of Psychology cited in Tindall 1994).

### ***Confidentiality***

Confidentiality arose as an issue in relation to my contacts with the theatre consultancies. All the contacts operated in same sector and location (London and the South-East) and were effectively in competition with each other – on several occasions project managers made reference to another theatre consultancy I had had access to or an individual I had interviewed. Thus directors were informed that the research is looking at other companies and that I would not divulge the names of the organisations with whom I was working in the writing up of the thesis nor would I discuss other consultancies' work or *modus operandus*. However, this also relates to the issues of anonymity – as this research will be written up with examples of different models and methods, if confidentiality is to be maintained, anonymity also becomes a key concern.

### ***Anonymity***

The question of anonymity for all the participants in the research was important. Firstly, as noted previously, it became apparent in the interviews with the project managers, that the field of work is relatively closed and people know each other. Thus interviewees would frequently mention people with whom they had worked who I knew, either through interviewing them myself or because they had come up in other conversations. Furthermore two companies in particular were well known in the London area and had a very distinct method. I therefore kept the names of the theatre-based consultancies anonymous and changed the names of the interviewees. All participant data was presented on the same basis.

It should be noted that there were no concerns expressed by any of the theatre consultancies regarding confidentiality or anonymity and it was interesting to note from the interview transcripts that the project managers were on the whole happy to disclose the names of their clients when discussing their projects; although there was an occasional request not to mention client names, this was not always the case. Common sense, however, would dictate that any references to specific clients would be inappropriate in the presentation of the thesis particularly as reporting client names would not add anything to the analysis. Thus any reference to names of the organisations, be they consultancies, commissioners or clients of consultancies, have been omitted.

When sending out tapes for transcribing I ensured as far as possible that none of the transcribers used had any links with the interviewees; to identify tapes, I only recorded on tape the first name of the interviewees and the date of the recording and all tapes were returned to me after transcription.

## **Harm to participants**

Harm to participants in the context of business research generally refers to ‘disclosure’ - that is ensuring that participants are not encouraged to discuss or disclose anything about which they feel uncomfortable. It is also important that participants understood that they did not have to respond to all (or any) of the questions (Tindall 1994) and that they could request the tape recorder be switched off at any time.

Tindall (1994) suggests that ensuring there is no exploitation of participants starts with the point of contact, which emphasises the importance of researcher’s own values, interpersonal skills and the need for the researcher to actively engage with participants. She also raises the issue of power – that there is the potential for a power imbalance between researchers and participants, the former having set ‘the process in motion ... who decides on the initial research issue ... and what happens to the final product’ (p.155). This puts the researcher in the position of being the ‘expert’; however I would suggest that while this might be the case in some areas of research, I cannot admit to feeling an expert – I genuinely felt that the participants in the research were the ones with the knowledge that I was eager to access. Nor did I have the problem, on the whole, of potentially accessing emotional territory – the area of research was ‘external’ for the participants, rather than internal as, for example, in research into health issues. It is also suggested that a way of reducing researcher ‘power’ is to enable participants to feel that they have some ownership, by offering copies of the interview transcripts enabling interviewees to make amendments. I did follow this suggestion for all one-to one-interviews<sup>15</sup> although the majority expressed surprise and only one participant took up the offer.

Harm to participants can also be linked to voluntary participation; as noted earlier while the project managers and commissioners were approached by me direct and were given every opportunity to turn down or not respond to the request, interviews for event participants and actors were arranged by their respective organisations. However at the beginning of these interviews, as with all the discussions, I reiterated the confidential nature of the discussions and that participation was entirely voluntary.

Having considered the ethical issues relating to this research, the next section outlines the preparation undertaken for the observations and interview. It includes a discussion on developing the observation and interviewing schedules.

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<sup>15</sup> It was not practical to offer transcripts to the group participants as I had not had contact details of individual members of the group and arguably the data is ‘owned’ by the whole group

## **Preparation for Data Collection**

### **Observation**

The primary purpose of the observations was to ensure familiarity with the process of such events, which proved to be invaluable in relation firstly to gaining access to participants, and, secondly maintaining credibility with the project managers and actors in particular. My field notes reflected this as when interviewing participants and commissioners in particular, it enabled me to be able to focus on the experience of the interviewees without having to seek detailed explanations of the event. It also enabled me to have familiarity with the 'product' when interviewing project managers, which gave me additional credibility.

The second purpose was to observe the structure, process and interactions during the events to enable me to gain first-hand experience which could be assessed both in relation to the interviews with the stakeholders and the practitioner and academic literature. I developed an observation schedule (Appendices 6(i) and 6(ii)) which consisted of a checklist of points that I considered were readily observable and would support my research objectives. Thus, for example, one of the espoused objectives of forum theatre events is to stimulate debate and discussion about organisational issues, which was reflected in my checklist. In relation to this, I was also interested in the nature of the interactions during the events, for example, how often participants debated with each other, or the extent to which the facilitator led, developed or even closed down discussions.

Drawing on Bryman and Bell's (2007) framework for undertaking structured observation (p.179), I drew up a coding sheet, listing potential types of interactions which might take place. In retrospect, this was fairly ambitious given that at the majority of sessions there were between 30 and 50 participants and, in hindsight, I should have recruited colleagues to support this activity; however, reviewing the sheets after each event, I believed that I had captured to some extent the nature of the interactions and how these were played out in reality.

### **Interviews**

The first stages of interview preparation are to define the research questions and create an interview guide or schedule (King 1994 p.18). The interview questions were initially developed from the literature but were subject to ongoing adjustment in the light of different themes emerging from the data as the research progressed. Thus, for example, as noted previously, my initial focus was on the events themselves, using the Boalian methodology as a framework to analyse the degree of control exerted by the facilitators during the event and the impact on potential learning. As my research developed however, given the fragmented nature of the literature, there seemed to be more fundamental questions to address, particularly how forum theatre is constructed by the consultancies themselves and how that perception aligns with the perspectives of the commissioners and participants.



## **The Interview Schedules**

Prior to starting this research I had the opportunity to be involved as a researcher in an evaluation of interactive theatre events for the Wellcome Foundation – this provided an opportunity firstly to carry out a series of pilot studies and, secondly, as some of the areas of exploration in this research were similar to mine it seemed appropriate to take the schedules used for this research as a starting point and then adapt them specifically to support my own research aims. Four interview schedules were initially developed, one for each group of interviewees. Later on in the process a fifth schedule was added for consultants who commissioned forum theatre on behalf of clients.

The aim of the interview schedule was to provide an aide-memoire so that I could ensure that specific areas had been discussed by the end of the interview. While the questions were initially ordered to follow my overall research questions, as is common, interviewees would often cover one area when responding to a different question. Following the guidelines for designing qualitative interviewing schedules (Bryman and Bell 2007; Charmaz 2006; King 2004; King and Horricks 2010; Kvale and Brinkman 2009), the majority of the questions were designed to be open ended rather than closed or if closed, would be followed up by an open-ended question. I had considered it likely that each interview had the potential to throw up areas that had not been anticipated so I wanted to ensure that I could retain flexibility. Several questions covered more than one research objective. I aimed to make the questions as free of jargon as possible, and use my own words or those I believed would make sense to the interviewees rather than, for example, terms from the literature. Thus, for example, the term ‘organisational theatre’ was unfamiliar to the first two project managers I interviewed and I therefore did not use that term in subsequent interviews.

The interviews were thematically structured in line with the research objectives (see Table 5.2 p.81) and covered the following areas:

### **Constructing Forum Theatre**

Given the multiplicity of organisational theatre terms offered in the literature, it was important to consider how the activity is constructed by those responsible for promoting and delivering programmes, as this construction impacts both on the espoused aims and objectives and on how the programmes are developed. This may, in turn, may effect how the programmes are received by the delegates. This theme was primarily explored with the project managers and commissioners.

### **Espoused Aims and Objectives**

This theme is related to how forum theatre is constructed by all the stakeholders. The literature identified a number of purposes of theatre-based interventions and the review highlighted that different approaches may be used to provide different outcomes. Furthermore, while the organisational theatre

literature makes relatively large claims concerning the purposes of such initiatives, these claims have not been fully explored.

### **Forum Theatre Processes**

More recent discussions on forum theatre have focused on the techniques of forum theatre rather than the underlying political intentions (Meisiek and Barry 2007). A number of different processes were identified in the literature as being key to the forum theatre events, including the use of narrative, levels of audience participation and the role of discussion and dialogue during and after such events; this section explored the extent to which the stakeholders considered these processes to be important to the interventions.

### **Evaluation and Impact of Forum Theatre**

It was noted in chapter four of the literature review that undertaking an evaluation of the organisational impact of forum theatre was problematic, thus evaluation and impact was primarily explored from an individual perspective. This part of the interviews firstly explored the extent to which commissioners and consultancies undertook evaluation and/or provided follow-up activities to support intervention; secondly the impact of the event both during and after the event was also discussed with participants.

Table 5.2 below illustrates the relationship between the research objectives, the themes from the literature review and the interview schedule. The interview questions are provided as examples and follow-up questions are not included.

**Table 5.2 Relationship between Research Objectives, Literature and Interview Schedule**

<b>Research Question 1: To review how Forum Theatre is used in organisations and identify the espoused aims and objectives of the different approaches</b>		
<b>Themes from Literature Review</b>	<b>Interview Questions (examples)</b>	
Constructing organisational theatre (Clark 2008; Clark and Mangham 2004 (a&b); Meisiek and Barry 2007; Schreyögg 2001)	How do you describe forum theatre when discussing its use?	Commissioners Project Managers
Typology of organisational and forum theatre (Babbage 2004; Boal 1979; Clark 2008; Nicholson 2004) Typology of arts-based interventions (Taylor and Ladkin 2009)	What principles in relation to using forum theatre underpin your work?	Project Managers
Comparison with functionality of theatre and applied theatre (Cole 1975; Jackson 2007; Nicholson 2004)	What do you see as being the aims /objectives of forum theatre events?	Commissioners Project Managers Actor/Facilitators
Espoused purpose (Clark 2008; Clark and Mangham 2004a&b; Schreyögg and Hopfl 2004;) Intentionality (Ackroyd 2000)	What did you see as being the aim of the event for you? Were these aims made clear?	Participants
Aestheticism and Instrumentality (Jackson 2007; Schechner 1988)	Thinking of forum theatre, in what circumstances do you use forum theatre and why (as opposed to other types of training)?	Project Managers

<b>Research Question 2:</b> <i>To identify the key components of organisational theatre/ forum theatre and to ascertain the extent to which the process or components of the process enable or constrain the achievement of the stated outcomes</i>		
<b>Themes from Literature Review</b>	<b>Interview Questions (examples)</b>	
Use of narrative ( <i>Taylor 2008; Turner 1982; Weick 1995</i> )	<i>How are the scripts/improvisations developed?</i>	Commissioners Project Managers Actor/Facilitators
Role of participants ( <i>Boal 1979; Cole 1975; Jackson 2007</i> )	<i>To what extent do you see the forum theatre process as being participant-led?</i>	Commissioners Project Managers Actor/Facilitators
Nature of participation ( <i>Boal 1979; Cole 1975</i> )	<i>How would you describe the level of your participation in the event?</i>	Participants Project Managers Actor/Facilitators
Construction of learning spaces ( <i>Burgoyne and Jackson 1997; Coopey 1998; Fulop and Rifkin 1997</i> )	<i>Did the event offer any solutions to the issues being presented?</i>	Participants
<b>Research Question 3:</b> <i>To explore the impact of forum theatre from an organisational and individual perspective</i>		
<b>Themes from Literature Review</b>	<b>Interview Questions (examples)</b>	
Problem of evaluation ( <i>Mabey and Finch-Lees 2007; Schreyögg 2001</i> )	<i>How did you evaluate/how are you evaluating the outcomes?</i>	Project Managers Commissioners
Dialogical approaches to learning; social sharing of experience ( <i>Coopey and Burgoyne 1998; Isaacs 1993; Meisiek 2002; Ortenbläd 2002</i> )	<i>Have you discussed the event with colleagues, acquaintances, and friend's members of your family? If yes, did you discuss the issues raised or the process of the event, or both?</i>	Participants
On-going support and follow-up ( <i>Jackson 2007; Schreyögg 2001</i> )	<i>Have you taken any specific actions as a result of attending the event?</i>	Participants

## Data Collection

### Group Interviews

The most common approach to interviewing is on a one-to-one basis (Bryman and Bell 2007; Flick 2009) and most texts on interviewing make this assumption. As discussed previously, the majority of my interviews were on a one-to-one basis, either face-to-face or on the telephone, but one set of participant interviews and two sets of actor/facilitator interviews were carried out on a group basis. I have chosen to call these group interviews rather than focus groups, as while the terms are to some extent used interchangeably (Bryman and Bell 2009), the distinctions are important in terms of the type of data I was collecting. Focus groups, which are extensively used in market research, tend towards the emphasis of a specific topic and the researcher is more interested in how members discuss the topic as a group rather than as individuals. Group interviews tend to cover a wider range of topics and the focus remains on individual comments in the context of the group discussion (ibid.).

The group interviews with participants were held initially due to expedience as my initial choice would have been to hold individual interviews. However, access to these participants was enabled through the Human Resources Director who requested a report after the interviews as part of his evaluation process. As he was interested in gaining the views of as many participants as possible, it was only feasible to do this in the time and with the resources allowed through group interviews. It is suggested that the maximum size for such groups to enable effective management is between six and eight members, where there is sufficient number of people to generate discussion, but not so large that individuals participants may feel reluctant to speak up (Morgan 1998; Bryman and Bell 2007). The HR administrator who organised the interviews was concerned that there might be difficulty recruiting more than six per group, although in the event the groups were over-subscribed. On reflection it might have been better to request groups of eight to take account of any of no-shows, although in the event this proved not to be an issue. Invitations were sent out by the HR administrator to all those who had attended the forum theatre programme so the groups were self-selecting. While I had concerns this could result in a rather narrow range of individuals, in the event the groups I interviewed were approximately 50:50 male and female, ethnically mixed and came from a range of different departments and roles in the borough, ranging from administrators to senior managers. Morgan (1998) notes that individuals in group interviews who know each other well may operate with 'taken-for-granted assumptions' and suggests that it is better if individuals do not know each other. I also had concerns that individuals might be unwilling to speak up in front of more senior people in their own department; consequently I requested that the groups should come from mixed departments.

This was the first set of participant interviews I held and while I had considerable experience of one-to-one interviews it was my first experience of group interviews in research. One issue in group interviews is the role of the facilitator and the degree of control necessary to enable all interviewees to have an opportunity to feel able to participate. While I employed the same schedules that I

subsequently used for one-to-one interviews, I used them to steer the topics I wanted to explore (Flick 2009) rather than working through each question methodically. This meant that I had to pay close attention to the discussion as it developed so that if an area started to be discussed under another heading, I could note that and reshape the schedule accordingly.

A further issue in group interviews is ensuring that everyone has an opportunity to contribute. I started each discussion by asking the group members to introduce themselves (Flick 2009) and took the precaution of ensuring that I knew each of the group members by name. This meant on occasions I could directly ask a named individual a question, particularly when I thought they had not recently contributed to the discussion. I also provided a summary of the points being made at regular intervals and then used phrases such as *“Does anyone else have a comment on this point?”* or *“Does anyone have a different view on this?”*, enabling individuals to provide additional points or correct me or other group members.

Almost to my surprise I enjoyed the interviews very much and found later on when comparing the transcripts between the one-to-one interviews and the group interviews that the data gathered from the latter seemed richer, with a greater divergence of views emerging. Group interviews or discussions often elicit a wider variety of different viewpoints as individuals have the opportunity to question each other, inconsistencies are more likely to be challenged by each other and issues of particular importance may be highlighted through being reinforced by other group members (Bryman and Bell 2007).

All of this was certainly the case in the group interviews – it was also interesting to hear the members of the groups making sense of the event as they explored the issues and reconstructed their experience in terms of their learning as well as providing me with data on their perceptions. On several occasions my experience reflected that of Milkman (1997), namely that the interviews developed their own group dynamic ‘in which my presence often became marginal’ (cited in Bryman and Bell 2007 p.343). The interviews took place over a period of a month and I found that the individuals taking part had begun calling them ‘workshop sessions’ rather than ‘evaluation sessions’, using them as much as a follow-up activity as an interview. The transcripts showed that in the later interviews my interventions became fewer as I became more confident about letting the groups lead the sessions, only intervening when I was concerned that by going ‘*off-piste*’ to too great an extent would mean that my specific areas (and those of the Human Resource Director) were not being covered.

### **One-to-One Interviews**

The majority of the interviews were on a one-to-one/face-to-face basis, and in a venue and at a time convenient for the interviewee. I have had significant experience in different types of interviewing, including counselling, selection and appraisal, which, while they vary in terms of intentions, are similar in approach. One of most important parts of the process is establishing rapport and I hoped to create an

environment where participants were relaxed and willing to talk. Kvale and Brinkman (2007) provides a list of ten criteria for successful interviewing – these include being knowledgeable, providing a clear structure while remaining open and flexible; allowing people time to reflect on their responses through being tolerant of pauses and silence and being comfortable with clarifying and interpreting comments without imposing my own meanings. In addition I tried to follow the ‘70/30’ recommendation for interviews, where the interviewee should be talking for the majority of the time.

One commissioner and two participant interviews were carried out over the telephone. I have to admit to a particular dislike of telephone interviews – I was reluctant to record the interviews as I felt it would be too intrusive when I was not known by the interviewees and I found the discussions far more stilted than when interviewing face-to-face even though I followed the same interview schedule as well as the recommendations for interviewing discussed above. This may have been because I was to some extent ‘cold-calling’ although I only interviewed those who had specifically stated they were willing to be contacted; in spite of this I still felt that I was intruding on the interviewees’ time, even though the interviews were shorter.

At the beginning of each discussion whether face-to-face or on the telephone I stated the purpose of the research and provided an overview of what I would be covering. I also checked that they were still happy to take part and reiterated that all discussions would be held in confidence. In the face-to-face interviews there were no issues about the conversations being recorded. I had no ‘difficult’ interviewees such as being uncommunicative or status conscious (King 2004) and with the project managers and actor/facilitator interviews my experience reflected Tindall’s (1994) observation that the problem ‘is not encouraging people to talk but rather getting them to stop’ (p.154). What was particularly encouraging was that a number of the interviewees, particularly the project managers and actors, commented how much they enjoyed the discussions and that it helped them to reflect on what they did and how they had developed their philosophy in relation to their work. It was also gratifying when comments such as *‘that is a very good question’* were made prior to responding which seemed to provide some validation that the areas I was exploring were relevant to the interviewees. There appeared as well to be little concern about offering up information that could be deemed to be confidential, sometimes flagged up, sometimes not; for instance, project managers were quite happy to talk about difficult clients they had had, without feeling the need to anonymise the names of the clients. This indicated a high level of trust, which suggests that I had set up the interviews in an appropriate way and that the interviewees believed that I would not abuse their confidences.

It was noticeable how the early parts of the transcripts focused on the achievements of the project managers and the growth of the business, which needs to be set in the context of my relationship with the interviewees; of the six project managers interviewed only one was known by me prior to the research taking place, the other five being accessed in a variety of ways as noted earlier. Although I had a pre-meeting with all the project managers I interviewed, nevertheless the narratives produced regarding the early days of their company or work put me in mind of being a client rather than a

researcher. All demonstrated a pride in how they had built up their companies, and in some of the accounts, the starting up of the company took up four or five pages of transcript. There was a sense that even though the project managers fully understood the purpose of the interview and I had no influence in obtaining future business, nevertheless they still needed to produce their credentials. This raises the question that there may be concern whether, in spite of having built up or being involved with a successful business, the project managers would be taken seriously outside the 'professional' theatre field.

### **Observation**

Participant observation is not without difficulties and it has to be acknowledged that there will be a considerable degree of subjectivity; one of the aims of theatre is to enable engagement and there were certainly times when I became drawn into the piece of theatre being presented and/or the subsequent discussions. For example at one of the events I observed, I got very drawn into a situation being presented on work-life balance with which I could identify, and found myself wanting to participate in the debate. I was never sure whether it was appropriate to join in the discussions, given that I observed several events, knew the scenarios (which would have been fresh to the delegates who would only have attended once) and I was also known by the actors as I had interviewed them. On one occasion I did briefly become a participant but felt some discomfort, over-stepping the boundaries I had set. As Banister et al. (2004) comment, 'given that the social world is socially created it is often very difficult to stand back from a process that one is already part of' (p.30) and I was aware that my own particular frameworks were potentially shaping my perceptions and subsequent observations of these events.

### **Data Analysis**

This section discusses the approach taken to analysing the data. Within qualitative data approaches, there is a variety of ways that such data can be analysed, all of which require 'some system for categorizing the various chunks ... relating to a particular research question, hypothesis, construct or theme' (Miles and Huberman 1994 p.57). Qualitative data analysis techniques range from the quasi-statistical through, for example, systematic content analysis, to the more nuanced or linguistic approaches, such as discourse and conversation analysis (King 1994; Ryan and Bernard 2003). The chosen method will derive from the ontological and epistemological perspectives, but whatever approach is taken, the process will, broadly speaking, comprise of data reduction, data display, drawing conclusions and verification (Miles and Huberman 2004).

Two issues emerged as I started analysing the data – firstly the lack of research on organisational and forum theatre meant that a number of propositions in the literature had not been empirically 'tested', leading me to make more use initially of *a priori* or construct codes than I had originally expected. Secondly, as I was undertaking a comparison of different perspectives, linking the data and exploring



the relationships between the different stakeholder perspectives was a complex activity, and I needed a method by which I could explore these perspectives while still enabling emergent themes to develop. This led me to draw on template analysis as the most appropriate method for analysing the data, firstly, because this approach provided a clear structure, and, secondly, enabled me to explicitly link the development of the initial codes from the literature (*a priori or construct*) and the emergent codes from the data (*in vivo*).

### **Template Analysis**

Template analysis is a 'flexible technique with few specified procedures, permitting researchers to tailor it to match their own requirements' (King 2004 p.257). King also notes that template analysis studies can 'handle' larger amounts of data than other interpretive methods and is particularly suitable 'when the aim is to compare the perspectives of different groups ...' (ibid.). This method thus seemed the most appropriate, given that the aim of the research was to compare different perspectives of forum theatre. This approach to data analysis requires the development of a hierarchical set of codes involving the grouping together of similar codes to produce a set of 'higher order' codes which provide an overview of the topic, and lower-order codes which allow more distinctions to emerge from the data (King 2004). Template analysis also allows for the development of *a priori* or pre-defined codes, which can initially guide the analysis (King 2004; Waring and Wainwright 2008). Further refinement can then follow to incorporate and develop emergent data from the interviews.

### **Data Coding**

A code is 'the most basic segment or element of the raw data or information that can be assessed in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon' (Boyatzis 1998 p.63). Coding is more than simply categorising the data (Strauss and Corbin 1990) and it is also important to be aware that the coding of qualitative data should go beyond the simple reduction of data into manageable chunks; rather it should be used as a method by which data can be expanded and reconceptualised while remaining connected to the whole to avoid fragmentation of data (Coffey and Atkinson 1996). Codes enable the link to be made between the original 'raw' data (the interviews, observations and documentary material) and the theoretical concepts developed through the initial literature review (Seidel and Kelle 1995). In relation to template analysis, it is generally suggested that while there can be as many levels of coding as the researcher finds useful (King 2004; Silverman 2004) too many levels can be counter-productive and can result in a loss of coherence and fragmentation of the data.

The first stage of this activity, which effectively was carried out in two parts, has been described as 'First Cycle Coding' (Saldaña 2009). In order to undertake the initial coding the *a priori* codes were used to produce a set of categories by which the data can be contextualised (Huberman and Miles 1994), primarily developed from the literature and my own experience of forum theatre, which in turn had informed the interview guide. These codes were derived from the key themes which emerged from

the literature review, enabling a link to be made between the research questions and the data, with the aim of providing ‘an analysis which directly answers [the] research question’ (Saldaña 2009 p.49) as well as acknowledging the pre-existing theoretical contributions (Hartley 1994). The second stage of this cycle was to explore *in vivo* codes which refer to ‘codes that derive from the terms and the language used by social actors in ... the course of interviews’ (Coffey and Atkinson 1996 p.32) and ‘helps to preserve the participants’ meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself’ (Saldaña 2009 p.76).

The literature had indicated that forum theatre events follow a linear structure – that is, distinct stages with an implied cause and effect. Thus events proceed through a series of activities, starting with the commissioning, and moving through to implementation which incorporates a number of processes / components which potentially impact on the outcomes. It aims to provide a ‘learning space’ (Coopey 1998; Fulop and Rifkin 1997), through the gathering or community of staff who have come to see the performance. A drama or narrative is enacted, based on the some aspect of organisational life which the audience recognises. The enacted drama is followed firstly by a dialogue between the actors and audience and then by a series of improvisational scenes, again incorporating discussion and dialogue.

The assumption appears to be that these components then lead to a set of outcomes within the event itself – the audience have a cathartic or emotional experience brought about by the enacted drama, which is relieved in the event by discussion among the participants (Meisiek 2002; 2004); through the replication of some aspect of organisational life in front of the participants and the subsequent changes to that scenario through the improvisation of alternative outcomes, learning is assumed to take place. However the uniqueness of the event also leads to discussion and dialogue outside the event (the ‘water-cooler moment’) leading the participants to contextualise the event and make sense of the drama(s) in which they have participated. Having made sense of the event these actions would lead to change in behaviour and/or actions by participants triggered by the event. Thus the first stage of the analysis was to explore the transcripts and observations in relation to the initial codes (drawn from the above structure), which are listed below in Table 5.3.

**Table 5.3 : A Priori Codes**

**1. Event Construction and Development:**

Spoused intentions (commissioner and consultant)

Forum theatre methodology - comparison with Boalian framework

**2. Processes of Forum Theatre:**

Role of actors/facilitators

Role of participants

Participant interactions

Perceptions of space

Use of narrative

Maintaining the boundaries – control versus empowerment

### **3. Outcomes:**

Individual change

Organisational evaluation

Management and participant follow-up to intervention

Each transcript was explored initially to look for codes that related to the above themes across the different sets of participants. Each re-reading produced further areas to explore and, unsurprisingly, a significant number of additional codes emerged. These codes were subject to continual review, while at the same time further data collection continued. Relationships between the various codes were explored and finally distilled into broader themes, which were situated in the related stages of developing, implementing and evaluating forum theatre events.

Once I had the initial structure in place, the template was subject to modification and updating through the development of emergent themes, which tended to relate to the interplay between the various stakeholders rather than individual themes. Thus, for example, I had assumed that the theme of ‘control’ would emerge predominantly through the enactment of the forum theatre intervention itself; during the second stage of analysis this appeared as a key theme during the commissioning process and script development, as well as in the actual performance.

The second stage of the process, axial coding, involved the examination of relationships between the codes, which enabled the development of higher or second order themes. Thus for example, the role of the facilitator which initially appeared to be a ‘stand-alone’ theme was extended as it became apparent that the stakeholders had different perceptions of that role, which impacted on how that role was actually carried out.

This stage of the analysis led to changes within the structure of the data, as once I had undertaken the comparisons between the stakeholder groups, it became apparent that the overall process was subject to ongoing negotiation between the stakeholders. Thus the second and third stages of analysis did not necessarily result in changes to the initial themes identified – rather they became more nuanced, with underlying issues emerging which had not been explored in the earlier literature. Thus while the overarching structure remained constant, the final template provided a clearer representation of the tensions and contradictions across the different perspectives through analysing the processes before, during and after forum theatre events. What emerged from the data was the way the process was subject to ongoing negotiation, implicit and explicit, the tensions and contradictions in the forum theatre methodology and the competing, and, sometimes, contradictory perspectives of the practitioners, commissioners and participants.

**Table 5.4 : Template for Analysis**

***Setting the Stage***

1. Intentionality
  - i. Construction of forum theatre with consultancy
  - ii. The Boalian discourse
2. The Commissioning Process
  - i. Explicit and implicit aims
  - ii. Script development
  - iii. Constraints and enablers

***Forum Theatre in Action***

3. Space and Performance
  - i. The performance space
  - ii. 'Difficult-ators' or facilitators
4. Identification and Distance
  - i. Telling a story - the dramatic representation
  - ii. From audience to participant
5. Managing the Learning Space
  - i. Defining and managing risk
  - ii. Social acceptability

***Impact and Outcomes***

6. Problem of Evaluation
  - i. Evaluating effectiveness
  - ii. Methods and measures
7. Impact on Participants
  - i. Distinctiveness and value
  - ii. Active participation
  - iii. Reflection and sense-making
8. Follow-up and follow-through
  - i. An act of faith
  - ii. Embedding forum theatre
  - iii. Social sharing of experience

## Data Structure

The final stage of the analysis was to categorise similar codes (1<sup>st</sup> Order Codes) into overarching themes (2<sup>nd</sup> Order themes) followed by these themes being further grouped into aggregate dimensions, as presented below (Table 5.5) to provide a structure for the presentation of the findings and analysis. It should be noted that this was an iterative process, as relationships between the codes were developed and changed during the writing-up stage.

**Table 5.5 : Data Structure**

<b>1<sup>st</sup> Order Concepts</b>	<b>2<sup>nd</sup> Order Themes</b>	<b>Aggregate Dimensions</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Constructing Forum Theatre</li> <li>○ The Boalian Discourse</li> </ul>	Intentionality	Forum Theatre in the Organisational Context
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Explicit and Implicit Aims</li> <li>○ Script Development</li> </ul>	The Commissioning Process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Maintaining Credibility</li> <li>○ The Power of Theatre</li> </ul>	Constraints And Enablers	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ The Performance Space</li> <li>○ ‘Difficult-ators’ or Facilitators</li> </ul>	Space and Performance	The Process of Forum Theatre
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Telling a Story – The Dramatic Representation</li> <li>○ From Audience to Participant</li> </ul>	Identification and Distance	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Defining and Managing Risk</li> <li>○ Social Acceptability</li> </ul>	Managing the Learning Space	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Evaluating Effectiveness</li> <li>○ Methods And Measures</li> </ul>	Problem of Evaluation	Impact and Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Distinctiveness And Value</li> <li>○ Active Participation</li> <li>○ Reflection and sense-making</li> </ul>	Reflection and (Re-) Construction	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ An Act of Faith</li> <li>○ Embedding Forum Theatre Interventions</li> <li>○ Social Sharing of Experience</li> </ul>	Follow Up and Follow-Through	

## Summary of the Chapter

This chapter reviewed the epistemological and ontological choices which informed the research design. It also provided the justification for using qualitative data (primarily semi-structured interviews and observations) as well background information about the context of the research and the identification of research participants. A review of ethical considerations was also undertaken, before providing an overview of the research process itself, including identifying research participants, collecting the data and undertaking the data analysis. Using template analysis, the process of ‘transforming’ the data through first, second and axial coding was discussed, leading to the presentation of the structure of the data to inform the findings which are discussed in the following chapters.

The findings from the research are presented in the next three chapters. The first chapter, *Forum Theatre in the Organisational Context*, reviews the application of forum theatre specifically within the organisational context, through a consideration of the processes by which project managers and commissioners construct and develop forum theatre interventions. Chapter seven, *The Process of Forum Theatre*, explores the ways in which the techniques and processes of forum theatre, identified in the literature review, have been transferred to the organisational context. Chapter eight, *Impact and Outcomes*, explores the impact of forum theatre interventions on participants and the methods by which such interventions are evaluated and followed up, both by commissioners and participants.

## Chapter 6

### Forum Theatre in the Organisational Context

#### Introduction

The first chapter of the findings explores how the perspectives of the project managers are translated into practice and compares and contrasts how the forum theatre methodology is constructed and enacted by the project managers and commissioners. This chapter draws primarily on data from the interviews with practitioners and commissioners to compare and contrast the different perspectives, supported by reference to observations of events. Within this chapter the data analysis presents three areas for consideration; the *intentionality* of such events, the potential tension between *instrumentality and aesthetics* and the perceived *constraints and enablers*.

This discussion is set within the context of the organisational and theatre studies literature where Augusto Boal's model has been referenced as providing the underpinning for forum theatre interventions in community and educational settings, and, to some extent in organisational settings. However empirical reviews of forum theatre support the proposition that the political intentions of forum theatre cannot be realised in the organisational context. (Clark and Mangham 2004a; Gibb 2004; Meisiek and Barry 2007). But given that theatre consultancies use the term forum theatre in their promotional literature and on their websites, to what extent do the practitioners in this study perceive that their work is related to the Boalian model, and how does their perspective align with that of the commissioners, both in terms of the construction of forum theatre, the purpose and distinctiveness of such interventions.

Thus this chapter aims to address the first research question - *to explore how forum theatre is constructed and to identify what are the espoused aims and objectives from the perspective of the consultants and commissioners*.

#### Intentionality

##### Constructing Forum Theatre

###### *Project Managers*

As noted in chapter five, the majority of the consultancies had started up in the in the late 1980s or early 1990s, and had initially focused mainly on 'skills transfer' work (figure 3.1 refers) using professional actors to undertake role play, supporting, for example, appraisal or disciplinary training. Given that the majority of the literature relating to forum theatre dates from the late 1990s, it is not surprising to find that the use of forum theatre by theatre consultancies had evolved relatively recently,

with the mid-to-late 1990s being cited by the majority of project managers as the time when they started to promote forum theatre as part of their portfolio.

What became clear from the conversations with project managers was that as ‘organisational theatre is not one practice but many’ (Meisiek and Barry 2007 p.1806) the same could be said of forum theatre in terms of how the label was used by the project managers and commissioners. Based on observations of events and discussion with project managers and commissioners, Table 6.1 below provides a summary of these different approaches.



**Table 6.1 Approaches to Forum Theatre**

Method/Form	Data Source	Features of Forum Theatre					
		<i>Intention</i>	<i>Relevant Issue</i>	<i>Active-Audience (type of participation)</i>	<i>Multiple Solutions</i>	<i>Participant control of script</i>	<i>Participant control of outcomes</i>
1. Presentation of a full length play (usually generic), followed by hotseating <sup>16</sup> of actors in character to trigger a discussion of the issues.	Observation Project Managers Commissioners	Show	Yes	Simultaneous dramaturgy	No	No	No
2. Presentation of a brief drama (maximum 20 minutes), followed by a hotseating activity leading to discussion of the issues	Project Manager	Show	Yes	Simultaneous dramaturgy	To some extent	No	No
3. Presentation of play scene by scene, 'do one scene and then stop it and at the end of the scene say what do you think and then work on that scene and take the story further' and then present the next scene as if the intervention hadn't happened (to avoid having to pre-empt the outcomes of the audience interventions before they happen).	Project Managers Observation	Show/ Experience	Yes	Simultaneous dramaturgy	Yes	To some extent?	Yes
4. Two or three actors playing out a scene in improvisational mode, directed by the audience in their seats (this might be done as a stand alone activity or as a follow on from the plays using the same characters but in a different setting)	Project Manager Observation	Experience	Yes	Simultaneous dramaturgy	Yes	No	Yes
5. Two or three actors playing out a scene with the participants being asked to come up and take part on stage	Project Manager Commissioner	Experience	Yes	Forum	Yes	No	Yes
6. The participants improvising their own material and professional actors developing a piece of theatre based on participants' ideas and 'Forumming' the outcome	Project Managers Actors Commissioner	Experience	Yes	Forum	Yes	Yes	Yes

<sup>16</sup> An activity where, following the presentation of a scene or a play, the actors are interviewed by members of the audience, with the actors staying in role as the character they have just portrayed

Forum theatre is structured in a number of ways, ranging from a one-day event to two hours or on occasions less, if used as a ‘warm-up’ to other non-theatre developmental activities. In the cases referred to in this study, the starting point is the presentation of a dramatic representation, which ranged from a full scale production, complete with lighting, costume, sound and effects to a short scene. The drama may be specially scripted to provide a mirror of the organization itself, it may be offered as a parallel universe, or provide the audience with an overview of the issues under discussion with little specific or no reference to the organisation itself.

From Table 6.1, only the final three methods fulfil all the criteria proposed from the literature review – however, project managers were less pre-occupied with the terminology than researchers and more interested in the actual method. Richard, (Project Manager) moved comfortably between the terms ‘forum theatre’, ‘forum workshop’ and ‘interactive theatre’, the latter term being closer to Meisieik and Barry’s (2007) active-audience theatre.

*Augusto Boal ... coined the term forum theatre. We coined forum workshop as a branded name. Forum workshop was made up when we trying to think up the name of our product ... we use the term forum workshop to describe our way with **interactive theatre**. It then got a bit confusing because we introduced an icebreaker scenario ... that first scenario isn't a forum workshop as we'd used forum workshop to describe the bit when you get the **audience to write the outcomes**. ... and you've probably found that lots of people use lots of different terminologies because in an evolving area there isn't the language for it. But I tend to use interactive theatre because it tends to state exactly what it is. (Richard, Project Manager)*

This approach resonates with the definitions of forum theatre, provided in chapter four of the literature review and indicates that thought had been given to the development of the process. It could be surmised that the initial use of ‘forum’ was intended to model Boal’s terminology, given that the techniques as described were similar; however, using the term ‘forum workshop’ rather than ‘forum theatre’ resonates more closely with training and development terminology. Thus, the method described above relates to the third category in Table 6.1, in which the session moves from an initial ‘ice-breaker’ drama, providing an introduction to the issues to what is termed forum workshop. Moving to the term ‘interactive theatre’ places the emphasis clearly on the techniques, rather than the intentions. Paul (Project Manager) identified a wider range of features, as highlighted in the extract below.

*.... I would say what we do is to work with you to **define a problem** which most of the people in the audience are going to be experiencing or are experiencing, something which is relevant to them, and ... write a scene which seems to represent some aspect of that problem. And we check it ... not only with the person sponsoring, **we would also check it through with the other individuals – at least two different members of the audience** ...and we play that scene out and give everyone in the audience a chance to adapt it and adjust it ... so that as a group they are solving this particular predicament which is relevant to you as a*

*group. And we will do it in a fun and a novel way. And the outcome of all that is that you will kind of generate a number of different possibilities as to how you want to go forward ... so it's a way of people trying to work out a problem together and recognising a problem together and it's a great way of bringing people together around that problem. (Paul, Project Manager)*

This description encapsulates more of the components of forum theatre as shown in figure 4.1; here there is an emphasis on relevance, the development of a script into which participants have some input into prior to the event being developed, the consideration of problem-solving and the development of different possibilities (rather than solutions), with an emphasis on potential change. It is relevant to note that this project manager had considerable awareness of Boal's methods,

However, both the above constructions place emphasis on 'multi-solutions', that is, the issue might not be fully resolved but participants have had the opportunity to develop a number of different outcomes. Thus while Table 6.1 showed variations in the form, particularly in relation to the use of dramatised version of the issues, there was consensus on the nature of forum theatre in terms of the techniques.

### ***Commissioners***

From the commissioners' perspective there was considerable less clarity about how they defined forum theatre. It was interesting to find that where commissioners had no previous experience of commissioning any form of organisational theatre (for example, skills transfer activities), there was a high reliance on the consultancies themselves for finding out more about the process. One commissioner, having seen a presentation by a theatre consultancy at a conference, found it difficult to locate a local provider:

*I have no experience of this type of event before. I heard about it a year ago at a ... conference which had a presentation by a group of actors and opened my eyes to a different way of doing things ... I chose this company because the only one I could find (Tina, Commissioner)*

Furthermore, while the project managers clearly distinguished between forum theatre as being group rather than individual focused, there was a tendency by commissioners who had used theatre-based training before, to conflate role-playing and forum theatre; one commissioner described forum theatre as 'using actors to make what would essentially be role play more realistic' (Hannah, Commissioner) which was echoed by others:

*Role play without the role play ... to allow you to 'fishbowl', to allow you to observe and have the professionals doing the acting. (Katherine, Commissioner)*

This emphasis on forum theatre as a form or development of role-play, but observing rather than acting, is interesting. Whereas the project managers focused on interaction, the commissioners in these extracts appeared to focus on observation – the seeing rather than doing. Some of the commissioners had commissioned actors for skills development and these commissioners, on the whole, considered forum theatre as an extension of this, rather than being a different set of techniques. Thus, forum theatre events were seen as being appropriate for both individual skills-based training (performance management, difficult conversations, disciplinary interviews) and issue-based (bullying, diversity, conflict, communication) event, without distinguishing between the two, either in relation to techniques or to outcomes.

While none of the commissioners was aware of the origins of forum theatre, the term ‘forum’ is more widely known being derived from the Latin meaning ‘market place’ and referring to a meeting place in Roman cities, the central square where political debates and discussions were held. Thus while it could be questioned why consultancies use the term which implies a specific methodology, to clients with no knowledge of the origins of forum theatre it would seem to be an appropriate term. Thus when asked ‘Do you know the origins of forum theatre?’ one commissioner suggested:

*It's where you create stories out of things that people might have said ... It may even date back to Shakespearean times where people came up with an idea and said, 'Now give us a story about it.' I'm just thinking back to ... you know, the Shakespearean times ... where you really talked about what was going on within society. You have a subject and then created a story, and I should imagine that would have started from forum theatre or even dating back to the Romans and their theatre. (Jane, Commissioner)*

Similarly, one project manager *suggested* that the term forum theatre could be used to refer to a meeting place where people had an opportunity to discuss issues.

*... literally the idea of forum theatre is that you have a forum ... you have a lot of minds looking at a particular subject and working on that together and sometimes coming up with a consensus. (Mark, Project Manager)*

Thus forum theatre is used as an umbrella term by project managers, encompassing a range of theatre activities, including play presentation, improvisation and interactive drama; however within these activities there was a distinction between the initial ‘presentation’ and the later forum theatre or forum workshop activities. Project managers nevertheless construct forum theatre in relation to the techniques used, with a focus on involving participants in a problem-solving process which is relevant to their own situation. Commissioners were less able to provide precise definitions, to some extent they drawing on their understanding of the term ‘forum’ as a meeting place, to define the activity as being about discussing and debating issues. The next section explores the construct of forum theatre in

more depth, through a consideration of how project managers perceive their work in relation to the work of Augusto Boal.

## **The Boalian Discourse**

Unlike the actors in Clark and Mangham's (2004a) study, the project managers interviewed for this research were far more tentative about the relationship with Boal's work. While acknowledging that the techniques were similar, there was acknowledgement of 'clear blue water' between forum theatre performances in a South American dictatorship and forum theatre in the organisational context. Of the six project managers interviewed, three were very familiar with his work and two had attended workshops in the UK with Boal.

*I spent two days in Bristol with Augusto Boal at a Cardboard Citizens event and I went on that because I wanted to sit at the foot of the man who started it all and he's extremely rude about using it for money or for business because he would say we are propping up the status quo and would have nothing to do with it ... so we've taken the technique to promote awareness and discussion and empowerment to people in the context of forum theatre. (Richard, Project Manager)*

Certainly raising awareness and stimulating discussion were cited as being key aims in the literature, (Meisiek 2007; Schreyögg 2001), but the extent to which forum theatre leads to empowerment of employees is more questionable, particularly from the commissioners' perspective. On the whole the majority of project managers and actors who knew about Boal's work agreed with Boal's dismissal of forum theatre being used in an organisational context, not on the grounds of technique but with reference to the underpinning philosophy.

*In terms of the original uses of forum theatre ... in the face of aggression and harsh politics and repression ... it was a fantastic method for that environment and it spawned a method that now has much wider use. So, no ... I don't think he [Boal] would feel ownership of it or proud of it at all, but I don't care. (Dan, Project Manager)*

One project manager made the point very clearly that the relationship with Boal's work was extremely tenuous if non-existent.

*I think that as an instructional method it's fine ... just don't pretend it's Boal. Don't try to pretend it's in touch with the great system change methodology or ethos. It isn't – it's an instructional method which uses acting, theatre, to get people engaged, that's fine, but don't call it what it's not. (Paul, Project Manager)*

This project manager was very familiar with Boal's work and, of all the project managers interviewed, was the only one who believed that the methodology was only effective with on-stage participation. He had attended a 'Legislative Theatre'<sup>17</sup> workshop run by Augusto Boal and Adrian Jackson as part of an urban re-generation scheme workshop:

*... but I've never seen it [forum theatre] work in an organisational context with the potential that I saw Boal use it when he came to London 12 years ago. It was at the Greater London Chamber ... and I've never seen it work in organisations with that kind of fun, aplomb and possibility of change (Paul, Project Manager)*

From the description provided of the work undertaken that day, the activities were not that different from those undertaken by the same project manager in an organisational setting. This description is reproduced to show the elements transferred to another setting:

*And we had three groups of people pretending to be institutions, one was transport, one was education, one was housing. And they got each of those groups of individuals to make up their own play. And they performed that play in front of a full council chamber and there was a lot of spect-acting from the floor. I guess people already knew about it and people were queuing up to get onto the stage ... so out of the suggestions that came from these things that were then turned into law by a team of really quite eminent lawyers – they had Tariq Ali sitting there and that very famous one, the dame, a judge now ... so some very eminent people and they framed laws, which came out of people's suggestions, transport, housing, and education and then we voted on the laws, so we had some democratically voted laws at the end of the evening which was going to improve the lot of these three areas ... it never went anywhere because it was an exercise but it could have done. And did, when Boal was working in San Paulo. (Paul, Project Manager)*

If this event is compared to those in organisational settings, the differences start to stand out. Firstly, in the above account, attendance was purely voluntary and those who attended appeared to have heard of Boal's work – thus on both counts the participants would be willing to engage with the process. Secondly, the participants were empowered, through the act of creating their own dramatic representations, to work with the issues that they considered to be of importance, which appeared to engender real engagement with the process. The event took place outside a specific organisational context, the participants being drawn from a range of public sectors (education, housing, health) rather than one organisation, which was likely to have removed constraints such as organisational norms and hierarchy, which would exist in a specific organisation. And finally, what cannot be ignored is Augusto Boal's experience, engagement, enthusiasm and even charisma as an important factor in engendering participation.

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<sup>17</sup> Boal (1998) defines legislative theatre as a form of 'Theatre of the Oppressed in which the 'citizen is transformed into legislator' (p.19)

This example highlights both the context and the nature of the relationship between the participants and facilitator as being key to developing the types of outcomes espoused by advocates of forum theatre, that is, it is not just the nature of the activities that are being undertaken but the underlying philosophy of the leader or facilitator, combined with the context of the event. This is important as it raises the question of to what extent is really possible to get that level of engagement with organisational issues such as diversity, communication or conflict management. It also highlights one of the challenges that practitioners working in the organisational context have to address, that is attendance is not voluntary and therefore the extent of the willingness of participants to actively engage may be mediated by factors outside the control of the actors/facilitators.

One project manager heard from actors who were doing forum theatre with other companies and decided to include it in his repertoire as another tool to enhance and support the role playing interventions his company was based on. Interestingly, while initially commenting that he did not know anything about Boal until he heard about other companies using the technique, and saw it as a second string rather than a fundamental part of the business, he was aware enough to comment that '*I don't know what Boal would think of people like me using or calling what we do Forum Theatre*' (Alan, Project Manager). This was echoed by the actors who were aware of Boal's work, one actor describing the method as being far more pragmatic and superficial – '*I think probably Augusto Boal would come and laugh and say, 'You call that forum?' Because ... it's more manipulative*' (Roz, Actor/Facilitator).

The term 'manipulate' has two meanings - 'to handle, treat with dexterity' and 'to control or influence cleverly or unscrupulously' (Oxford English Dictionary). If the latter meaning is attributed, then this comment supports the concerns expressed by Nicholson (2005) that, in the organisational context, the intentions of forum theatre are purely instrumental, and covertly Machiavellian. Indeed, St. George et al. (1999) comment that 'In as much drama has the potential to create poignant and highly successful learning opportunities, it may also have the capacity to manipulate, distort, and compromise training goals and participant integrity' (p.79). Certainly this extract would support concerns expressed by Boal, that using forum theatre in organisations may compromise the integrity of the original model.

The initial discussion about how project managers and commissioners construct forum theatre shows that while project managers do identify features that resonate with the original model, commissioners have less clarity about the different forms. However, while the knowledge of Boal's work ranged from some awareness to having encountered his work personally, it was acknowledged that while the techniques are used, the underlying philosophy does not translate to the same extent, given that in the organisational context the purpose and the espoused outcomes are driven not by the participants, but by the commissioners. Boal's refusal to endorse such organisational initiatives on the grounds that it is not his aim to maintain an organisation's status quo (Clark and Mangham 2004a; Larsen 2005) would seem to be supported by the project managers' perspective.

It is not surprising that commissioners, taking their lead from providers, have a lack of clarity about the distinctions between the various approaches, and certainly there was a lack of knowledge about the political origins of forum theatre, although the term ‘forum’ had a wider resonance. From the discussions with the project managers, I would not interpret this as deliberate concealment; the project managers with a good knowledge of Boal made clear distinctions between his work and what they were offering, and it was also acknowledged that marketing forum theatre as a method by which the organisational status quo is significantly challenged would be hard to sell. The focus thus switches to the techniques of forum theatre, and the extent to which the processes genuinely open up the types of learning spaces advocated in the literature (Burgoyne and Jackson 1997; Coopey 1998; Coopey 2002; Fulop and Rifkin 1997).

The next section explores the commissioning process from the perspective of the project managers and commissioners, firstly examining the espoused aims and objectives, before considering the ways in which the events are developed, particular attention being paid to the development of the scripts, which underpin forum theatre interventions.

## **The Commissioning Process**

### **Explicit and Implicit Aims**

While there appeared to be a difference between commissioners and consultancies in how they constructed forum theatre, their views of the purpose of forum theatre was more in alignment, the main difference being that of emphasis. Thus, in terms of the aims of these events, they ranged from the specific (changing attitudes and behaviour) to the general (challenging mind-sets, increasing awareness, changing organisational culture). One project manager was, however, very clear:

*We're trying to **teach** [my emphasis] skills like empathy and discussion and hearing the other point of view and **not accepting** but respecting those views. (Dan, Project Manager)*

Within this short extract are a number of interesting points. Firstly, it indicates that there is an initial aim of enabling identification and empathy, in contrast to the Brechtian and Boalian perspectives discussed previously. Secondly, the term ‘teaching’ is used, emphasising forum theatre as an ‘*instructional method*’ (Paul, Project Manager). While arts-based learning may well increase the ability of participants to empathise (Fanshawe 2006), the use of the term ‘training’ (rather than developing) is surprising, although such comments provide support for the proposition that the emphasis is on first-rather than second-order change (Clark and Mangham 2004a). Thus, there appear to be two discourses – while the literature emphasises forum theatre as a dialogical approach to learning and development, the project managers’ language assumes a more didactic form of theatre, a belief that there is ‘a body of knowledge about a specific subject that that needs to be conveyed directly or indirectly to the



audience' (Jackson 2007 p.15). In forum theatre, this would seem to refer to the types of behaviour that are acceptable or unacceptable in a given set of circumstances.

The typology of organisational theatre (Figure 3.2) positions forum theatre, as an intervention which aims to collectively influence behaviours, on the basis that changes in individuals may lead to changes in the organisation; thus the intention would be to address the underlying issues related to a particular organisational situation, enabling participants to make informed choices about their behaviour **and** empowering them to make significant changes which would benefit the participants as individuals as well as the society or organisation of which they are a member.

*For me it's about stopping people in their tracks and saying, or doing enough to get them to consider themselves and their environment and consider their actions and how they might view things differently in the future, or act differently in the future ... (Paul, Commissioner)*

This extract, which relates to an organisational-wide intervention, through the reference to 'the environment' embodies both individual change through reflecting on their individual reactions, plus places that reflection within the context of the (organisational) environment. However, another commissioner was rather more tentative:

*... we weren't expecting anything about legislation or people to come away with knowledge about legislation. It was much more about raising people's awareness about their behaviour, for them to think a bit more before they acted or spoke (Jane, Commissioner)*

However, it was also clear that commissioners saw 'raising awareness' as being by no means the one and only purpose. What also came across from the commissioners' interviews was that there were key objectives which needed to be met - 'in every scenario there were some key things we were trying to get across' (Julie, Commissioner) - or, in cases where forum theatre was being used to develop individual skills - 'I knew what I wanted to, I knew what was wrong, and what I wanted to fix, ... and I did know the outcomes' (Katherine, Commissioner).

The extent to which these aims were communicated to the participants was limited. Through observations of events it was noticeable that there were rarely references to the overall aim of the event, nor were the espoused outcomes, learning or otherwise, referred to, which some participants found frustrating. It is worth noting that again, in this extract, the term 'training' is used, referencing the marketing material for this particular event which was described as 'training'.

*I've got this idea about training that you know what you are being trained in when you finish and I think in that regard, it wasn't 100 per cent clear to me that I knew what I learnt when it was all done and dusted. I think that this is something I had more on reflection ... the*

*learning outcomes were not that clear and I wasn't that clear about what I learnt either ...*  
(Nigel, Participant)

Another participant, when asked about what he perceived to be the aim of the event, started off quite confidently and then found himself tailing off.

*... only in very general terms, to promote awareness of the need for – my answer here is just trailing off into very, very vague jargon, which I am regretting* (Robert, Participant)

One project manager offered an alternative explanation for the lack of clear learning outcomes:

*If I had to put my name to something at the start, it would be 'You will leave having had a good time and ... and your awareness and understanding what the concepts of diversity and you will bind to it as a positive in your life and organisation'. If I said that ... no-one is going to be interested. And they're not really going to understand what I've said ... so you know that's pointless* (Dan, Project Manager)

This argument aligns itself to traditional theatre – while programme notes might well set out the background of the play or provide scholarly notes about the production, it would be strange to start off a performance with a set of stated intentions about what the audience are expected to take away with them.

This exploration of aims and purposes of forum theatre highlights a number of issues which will be developed further during the analysis. Firstly, the extent to which, in reality, forum theatre is best classified as didactic or dialogical theatre (Jackson 2007); secondly, the extent to which outcomes are, in reality, fixed from the outset rather than be 'endogenously shaped' (Meisiek and Barry p.1808) through the reactions of participants. What became clear from the discussions with the project managers and commissioners was that the scripts were developed for the purpose of underpinning the interventions. While this point may be self-evident, the way in which the scripts were developed sets the context for the implementation of the event itself.

### **Script Development**

A script presents '*the expressive form created for our perception through sense or imagination and what it expresses is human feeling*' (Langer 1957 cited in Mangham and Overington 1987 p.105). The dramatic form is unlike say, a book or a work of art, in that the script is the starting point, and subsequently becomes subject to interpretation by the actors and directors, the 'triadic collusion' (Mangham and Overington 1987) referred to previously. In the organisational context, the triad becomes the managers, commissioners and participants; however, while a theatre audience will have

no influence on what is presented on stage, nor how the drama unfolds, in forum theatre ‘the narrative is unmade and remade before our eyes’ (Babbage 2004 p.45).

Thus forum theatre scripts are designed to engage the participants with the issue by provide a representation of their organisation and all the forum theatre events observed involved a scripted event at the start of the session. The length varied from a ten-minute ‘sketch’ to a full-length play; of the events observed, one was introduced as being a parallel organisation or an analogy of the participants’ own organisation, another presented a drama which, while not intended to represent the organisation, incorporated incidents and conversations which would be familiar to that organisation and the other two events presented short scenes which were clearly generic. However, whichever form they took, they aimed was show the audience recognisable behaviours and, through identification with those behaviours, ‘facilitate diagnosis’ (Weick 1995 p.129) of the issues being presented.

Adrian Jackson (2010)<sup>18</sup> argues that for participants to engage with the process, forum theatre scripts needs to possess a synergy between the audience and the subject area; therefore such scripts must be contextualised to the audience. Without this synergy, that is a connection with and interest in the subject area, participants or spect-actors will not be energised to participate (ibid.). The dramatic representation were seen by the project managers as being key to engaging the audience from the start of the event, drawing their attention to the issues to be discussed and providing an opportunity to step back from their routines and ‘getting the audience deeply involved in the problem situation and confronting it with hidden conflicts, subconscious behavioural patterns, or painful truths’ (Schreyögg and Hopfl 2004 p. 697). The need for synergy was supported by the project managers, and, without exception, the starting point for the theatre consultancies was researching the company, whether or the script aimed to illustrate a particular aspect of the issue under discussion, or provides a mirror to the organisation – the parallel (or actual) universe:

*The first thing you do is the research – what are the issues, what’s their daily work life, what is the language they use, what sort of situations are they going to recognise, what sort of characters are they going to recognise. (Tony, Project Manager)*

The issue of research proved to be interesting – a number of project managers stated they aimed to involve staff in the process, both formally through focus groups, or informally by ‘*hanging around in canteens and corridors, grabbing people to have a word with them*’ (Julie, Commissioner). While this approach would indicate that participants have an opportunity to be involved at an early stage, it also needs to be recognised that the theatre consultancies will already have received a brief from the commissioners which, to a greater or lesser extent, will have set both the issues to be considered and the learning outcomes. Thus, while one project manager appeared to be more interested in the participant rather than management perspective, and emphasised the role of formal discussions with

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<sup>18</sup> Adrian Jackson speaking at a Forum Theatre Workshop attended by the researcher

staff, it is challenging to see how the following rhetoric aligns itself with the need to support the management position.

*... on a standard research day you'll have a 45 minute meeting in the morning with the person who's specifying the project and talk to them about what their targets are, take it all up with a heavy pinch of salt, throw away all the bits that are obvious nonsense and then spend the rest of the day, in either a series of focus group discussions (with staff) where you've got 3 or 4 people, or a series of one-on-ones ... (Dan, Project Manager)*

Furthermore, this project manager were more than aware of the need to sell the product, so while there might be a preference for taking a more democratic approach, there was also a need to align himself with the organisational perspective to maintain credibility.

*I'm interested in the individual delegates and what I can do for them, that's my passion, that's what excites me about my job, but I only get to do that if I hit the organisational target. (Dan, Project Manager)*

So while the data suggests there is a willingness for the participants to have involvement in the script development, this approach was clearly limited by the need to meet the commissioners' requirements. It is also worth noting that the two consultant/commissioners had a preference for writing the scripts themselves:

*I've got a tendency to write my own script. I think there is a little bit of the playwright in me. I think just because I have a very clear vision and I also think it cuts out the element of me saying to them, 'This is what I want,' them sending something to me and me saying, 'That's not really what I wanted.' (Hannah, Commissioner)*

Both the consultant/commissioners had had experience of using theatre-based interventions prior to using forum theatre, and may have had more confidence in developing the scripts themselves, rather than hiring the theatre consultancy. It also suggests that there was a need to retain overall control given that they were they were acting on behalf of a third party. In such cases the script clearly sets out the boundaries, with perhaps less attention being paid to dramatic structure; furthermore, in these instances, participants did not appear to be consulted about the issues. It is difficult to hypothesise whether or not this approach led to less buy-in from the participants, although it should be acknowledged that even with the most consultative approaches, when an event is designed to reach the majority of employees over a series of weeks, it is not possible to consult or involve more than a small percentage of participants without considerable financial outlay.

Thus, the emphasis on script development shows that the script is considered to be a key part of the process of developing forum theatre interventions. In the cases where the theatre consultancies

developed the script more attention is paid to some participant involvement at an early stage, whereas, when the script was developed in-house, it seemed to be assumed that there was a pre-existing understanding of the issues, and that while there was still a recognition of the need to find a way of engaging the participants, there seemed to be less interest in involving staff in the process. This offers one example of how forum theatre is bounded prior to implementation. The final section of this chapter explores other constraints which may be in operation, as well as considering the distinctiveness of forum theatre approaches.

## **Constraints and Enablers**

### **Maintaining Credibility**

An interesting theme that arose in the course of the discussions with the project managers was a continuing emphasis on maintaining credibility with their clients. Even during the interviews with project managers it was noticeable how the early parts of the discussions focused on the achievements of the project managers and the growth of the business and put me in mind of being a client rather than a researcher. All demonstrated a pride in how they had built up their companies and, in some of the interviews, the accounts of how the theatre consultancy was started, and the subsequent success, took up four or five pages of transcript. Thus, even though the project managers fully understood the purpose of the interviews and that I had no influence in obtaining future business, there was a sense that they needed to produce their credentials, raising a question about whether, in spite of achieving success in their business, they would be taken seriously outside the 'professional' theatre field or within the commissioning organisations.

Personal appearance seemed to be important. There was a view that looking or even sounding like an actor (whatever that might be) would not be an effective way of getting business, and initial success was attributed to an appearance of normality by the lead consultants:

*I'm not a terribly 'luvvie' actor. I'm quite normal, quite sort of, you know, the acceptable face of actors. And I think the fact that I was very nice, approachable and professional, businesslike in my approach and I did what I said on the packet, I think really paid off ... we were seen as being very professional and understanding the world of business ... (Mark, Project Manager)*

Not only did the project managers aim to present themselves as understanding business, but there was also a belief that there was a need to appoint actors who could be perceived to fit an organisational norm and would therefore, again, be credible in the eyes of the commissioners and the organisations' employees.

*Some [actors] just didn't look right and they wore terrible suits or tatty shoes or just didn't have the right sort of look, ... I suppose it's about fit ... and there was a guy who we really liked, we thought was lovely and very good but he was too quirky ... and a bit eccentric and I thought nice guy, but what am I going to do with him, where am I realistically ever going to use him ... he was wearing a brown moleskin suit. We ask people to wear corporate clothes and he came wearing a brown moleskin suit. (Alan, Project Manager)*

As well as potential organisational actors needing to present a corporate appearance they were also required to have an understanding of business:

*All the actors ... have to have some understanding of the business ... one of my regulars is an ex-corporate lawyer who after ten years as a partner in a law firm decided to throw it all up to be an actor ... there is another one I use who used to be in sales. So they have that experience and that makes a BIG difference (Tony, Project Manager)*

While one project manager took the opposite view, stating that the business aspects of the job can be learnt, the data does suggest that the maintenance of the organisational status quo, which Boal took objection to (Clark and Mangham 2004a), starts early in the process of delivering forum theatre interventions. Through hiring actors who look the part, and speak 'business-speak' the emphasis is more on external attributes, rather than internal. As will be discussed later in this section, that is not to say that the skills of the actors is ignored; rather that in the field of organisational theatre, there is need for more than their acting skills. The hiring of the actors was seen by the project managers as key to the success of bringing theatre into an organisational space, although there was some divergence as to what experience was required in new recruits.

Where the commissioners had input into the appointment of actors, again there was a similar requirement for business 'fit':

*Linda (Commissioner) Typically the best actors are those that have all been in business and that's the strength of the act. Mainly that they've been in business.*

*Interviewer So that's one of your criteria? That they have to have had a business background and then gone into acting?*

*Linda Yes. I wouldn't work with any actors who hadn't. Mainly because it's language, it's face validity. Within those few minutes when the participants meet them, if they're talking a different language and that's what forum theatre does, it creates validity. Face validity in that whole process, so the language has to be right*

From the project managers' and commissioners' perspective, having access to actors who have had a business background is clearly an 'enabler' rather than a constraint, in that it enables the 'product' to be sold more easily, particularly where commissioners specifically require this, and, of equal importance, supports the quest for credibility, both by the theatre consultancies and their clients. However, all the actors/facilitators interviewed for this study had a theatre rather than business background, which would suggest that, on the whole, that it is the actors' skills that are of primary importance, although one actor/facilitator with no business experience commented that she was concerned initially that *'I don't know 'management-speak'. ... like speaking French. I can't do it'* (Mandy, Actor/Facilitator).

The issue of credibility also emerged through frustration by one project manager that forum theatre was *'seen sometimes by clients as being sort of nice, fluffy, you know, warm-up exercise'* (Mark, Project Manager) which constrained their potential to develop their work further; it was suggested that if potential clients had a deeper understanding of theatre and theatre approaches, more could be achieved by being given freedom to innovate:

*... what I'd like to do is spend the whole morning doing acto-rish breathing games, getting rid of inhibitions, doing lots of creativity exercises and then getting them to do a really meaty piece of forum theatre in the middle of the day, by which time they'd really, I think, be up for it and really understand the process and really want to join in. So that would be my ideal ...*  
(Mark, Project Manager)

This comment was echoed by another project manager – *'We do sometimes do exercises particularly if we think the audience need warming up – but usually we find we don't have time and it's very expensive'* (Tony, Project Manager). Thus, although none of the commissioners described using theatre-based techniques in this way, this approach of using theatre games resonates with the original forum theatre model, in that neither Augusto Boal nor Adrian Jackson expected their audiences to participate in forum theatre without some initial activity, to enable trust and confidence to be developed among the participants (Boal 1992; Jackson 1997).

Thus it is difficult to argue that commissioners of forum theatre are wanting to introduce more radical methods into organisations, and, as discussed in chapter four of the literature review, appear to take a more pragmatic view, that theatre-based interventions and forum theatre are a different, rather than radical, method of engaging staff in training and developmental activities. However, this in itself would indicate that forum theatre can offer something distinctive which would be difficult to replicate by other methods and is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

## **The Power of Theatre**

The earlier part of this section has focused on the aspects of forum theatre that may constrain the ability of the form from meeting its stated intention. What has been omitted is that in spite of the

acknowledged constraints, theatre, in whatever form has the potential to engage individuals in ways which are sometimes hard to articulate and explain. As one actor/facilitator commented, in considerable detail:

*... and then we do, you know, what Shakespeare was doing to society, though not perhaps quite as eloquently, ... where he would try and hold a mirror up to the human condition, I think we try holding a mirror up to an organisation so that they watch it slightly larger than life, they watch themselves reflected and that's very, very powerful. And it's funny, you know the reason that people laugh it's not because we're all great comedians - though obviously some of us are - but it's because they recognise the truth of the situation or the truth of the piece of language... the fact that it speaks to people and they feel that they are seeing themselves up there and are able to confront an image of themselves without feeling that somebody's telling them or criticizing them... (Roz, Actor)*

Some of these issues will be discussed in the following chapter – the sense of participants recognising themselves, the use of humour, the mirror reflecting ‘the human condition’. What is being articulated is that embedded in the theatrical form is the ability to show, without an enormous amount of effort, life as it is and life as it could be. It was not difficult to find further examples – this extract is typical and sums up a number of comments from practitioners:

*... the combination of the intellectual and the emotional has a huge impact. But I think if you put on a decent play ... I mean people get cross when one of the characters isn't behaving properly or one of the other characters is not behaving properly for them and so they have an emotional ... I think that is very, very powerful. The combination the intellectual and emotional really, really works. And the other thing is it's a really pain-free way of tackling some very, very difficult issues (Tony, Project Manager)*

While the practitioners would be expected to provide a coherent, often rhetorical, account of what is distinctive about forum theatre interventions, their comments were supported by the commissioners. In addition, a significant number of features were identified, which resonate with the organisational and theatre studies literature, as the following extracts show.

*... it's very much alive and ... can involve the audience ... because you can use humour in an appropriate way, so you can use a range of emotions. And I think the fact that it is visual, it's in front of you, so it's more of an enjoyable experience and also because it leaves a different impression which you take more away from that than if you were reading a book or looking at something online. So it gives more of an opportunity to explore the issues ...think it gave breadth and depth and a level of engagement which is hard to replicate by other methods. (Julie, Commissioner)*



*... you can actually mirror social interactions through theatre and do it in a more impersonal way so the behaviours become the actors' rather than your behaviours ... And so therefore you're not actually criticising the individuals, you're criticising the actors or the people in the play. (Jane, Commissioner)*

Thus, in relation to the model of forum theatre, presented in chapter four (figure 4.1), the commissioners identified many of the features which are emphasised in the literature. Thus there is the live representation of some aspect of organisational life (Meisiek and Barry 2007; Schreyögg 2001), the focus on participant engagement, the implicit reference to second-order observation (Clark 2008; Schreyögg 2001; Taylor 2008), and critiquing the behaviours observed, through discussion, in a psychologically safe environment (Taylor 2008). Humour too, was also referred to being a key element to engagement, and cited on a regular basis by practitioners and commissioners:

*[the actor] also stirred up humour - it was almost like a dark humour because it was so out of order. You were laughing because it was embarrassing not too, because he was so ignorant of good practice and this totally bewildered look on his face, ... he stirred up stronger emotions and that's when the learning takes place doesn't it, when emotions are engaged? (Julie, Commissioner)*

The role of humour, briefly discussed earlier in this chapter, will be considered in more detail in the next chapter, when exploring the dramatic representations and forum workshop; however, it is worth noting here as, from the above comment, which was not untypical, the ability of the actors to portray the issues in a humorous, yet believable manner is noted as being important to the overall levels of engagement.

However, little attention was paid by commissioners to the potentially open-ended nature of forum theatre, that is the possibilities for emergent rather than pre-ordained outcomes (Meisiek and Barry 2007), the creation of learning spaces espoused by supporters of theatre-based interventions (see Coopey 1998; Coopey 2002; Thrift 2000). Indeed, the above comment mentioned 'good practice' with the implication that while humour, in this example, was beneficial to participant engagement, the engagement was with the message rather than the process. As Coopey (2002) notes, in spite of the rhetoric of moves to more radical approaches to organisational learning, 'there seems no intention of prompting any radical, thoroughgoing rethinking of personal and corporate values' (p.56), rather aiming to promote a unitarist perspective of what is acceptable and not acceptable by the organisation. Thus while commissioners did see saw forum theatre approaches as being non-traditional and different from learning in classroom environments, the difference is in the structure of such events rather than the outcomes.

## Conclusion

This first chapter explored how forum theatre is contextualised and constructed within organisations and considered the espoused aims and objectives from the perspective of the project managers and commissioners, and to what extent these perspectives were in alignment. Thus to summarise, forum theatre in the organisational context is presented as being as an interactive training or development method which allows participants to observe on-stage events, interact with the ‘story’, discuss and debate the issues and offer ways in which the issue being depicted can be changed. The structure and form of forum theatre can, therefore, be clearly linked to forms of applied theatre, as discussed in chapter two. The data supports the proposition that forum theatre interventions start with the clients identifying specific issues that need to be addressed – these ‘issues’ may be at an individual, team or organisational level with the aim of using theatre- or drama-based interventions to bring about a change and the analysis shows that the perspectives were generally in alignment. The main emphasis seemed to be twofold, firstly to raise awareness of a particular issue and through that awareness reflect on how (individual behaviours) could be changed. The dramatic representations aimed to trigger emotional engagement leading to discussion and debate resulting in an increased understanding of other people’s perspectives.

However there are competing discourses from both commissioners and consultancies; side-by-side with an emphasis on involvement, participation and (potentially) open-ended debate, the events are managed to deliver clear outcomes. While there is indeed reference to engagement, discussion and interaction, there is, at least on the commissioners’ part, an emphasis on ensuring that the discussions stay focussed on the issues that the managers deem to be of importance, supporting the proposition that forum theatre in the organisational context tends to be promoted and used as a method for increasing business efficiency ‘rather than [for] any political or moral reasons such as creating an equitable workplace’ (Nicholson 2004 p. 50). Of course this is not an unexpected finding. Public and private sector organisations are required on an ongoing basis to seek improvements in their methods of operation and therefore will be seeking ways of engaging their staff in the change process.

The difficulty with comparing these perspectives is that, on one hand there are the demands of the managers to develop an appropriate and possibly ‘controlled’ learning intervention and, on the other hand, the nature of theatre which potentially creates more ambiguous outcomes. Unsurprisingly there is both synergy and dissonance. Meisiek and Barry (2007) argue, ‘managerial intentions expressed in the organisational theatre are only the beginning of any change process’ and that ‘the responses of employees ... are endogenously shaped and cannot be anticipated’ (p.1808); commissioners, however, suggest they are looking for a more controlled approach to learning and development. This is also reflected in the lack of promotion by project managers of alternative ‘theatre of oppressed’ methods, such as theatre games and improvisation which Augusto Boal also used as a method of engendering participation. As Clark and Mangham (2004a p.847) comment, in the context of overtly political, even revolutionary, intentions of forum theatre, ‘The aim of many of the exercises, improvisations, and

discussions is to have the participants represent their positions to each other through symbolic means, largely, but certainly not exclusively, through spoken discourse.’ Workshops and games were used in the theatre-based approaches discussed by Monks et al. (2001) who noted that this particular intervention led students to questioning the hierarchical systems within the university; while their research was based on a limited sample, it provides support for Coopey’s view (1999, 2002) that such methods have the potential to de-stabilise organisational power relationships. Thus, while more radical interventions may encourage radical learning it is questionable to what extent organisations want creative, freethinking managers or staff who are questioning of the status quo (Coopey 1998; Gilmore and Warren 2007). As Gilmore and Warren (2007) comment, theatre and business are only likely to work well together when ‘the marriage contributes to organisational success’ (p.117).

The second area of ambiguity is the constraint, perceived or actual, posed by the need for project managers visibly to demonstrate business credibility; this supports previous concerns about the extent to which the business world views the arts’ world to be ‘other’ than them (Meisiek and Hatch 2008) and emphasises the perceived duality ‘which sets an evil corporate world that is motivated by power and control against the sacred art world that is motivated by personal freedom and exploration’ (Taylor and Thellessen 2007). While, of course, the organisations in this study had commissioned a theatre-based intervention, it was undertaken on the commissioners terms; in other words, there was a perceived need by practitioners to ‘fit’ with what they thought would be considered acceptable by the commissioners, rather than a more negotiated approach, with more emphasis on using theatre in a less instrumental way.

Thus the process of putting together a forum theatre event is shaped by a number of preconceived assumptions and expectations on the part of all those involved, which are not always clarified. While the organisational theatre literature suggests that it is the participant perspective that leads the process and the outcomes are defined by participants not management, closer examination shows a clear tension between the espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris 1990; Argyris and Schon 1991); it is the commissioning process that plays a key role in determining how the event is played out and it is the organisational or management perspective that tends to prevail in terms of specified outcomes in order for the consultancy to get the business. Even though participants may be offered opportunities to input into the script, the issues (and to a greater or lesser extent, the scripts themselves) remain pre-determined by the commissioners. While in the human resource management and organisational studies literature considerable attention is given to the need for greater employee participation across organisational life, including moves to more democratic and open-ended organisational learning, the reality is that ‘managers are still in practice working from a perspective that values unity and control over plurality’ (Clark and Butcher 2006 p.314).

Given this emphasis on management interests during the commissioning process, it was unsurprising that project managers supported the view that it was the technique of Boal’s work that was used rather than the initial intention (Clark 2008; Clark and Mangham 2004a; Meisiek and Barry 2007) and it was

clearly acknowledged by the project managers that the original purpose had been subsumed or even subverted by undertaking the work in the organisational context. This is direct contrast to Clark and Mangham's (2004a) observation that that the companies they reviewed argued that their work was closely based on the Boal's original model, both in terms of their political intentions and the techniques employed. This contrasting perspective may be because Clark and Mangham's research was carried out in the early days of forum theatre being used in the organisational context, when there may have been less awareness of the implications of promoting forum theatre as a radical approach to learning and organisational change. This leads to the question as to why theatre consultancies continue to make use of the term forum theatre – the data suggests that firstly, having made use of forum theatre techniques the consultancies see no reason to change the term, and, given the lack of awareness by commissioners of forum theatre antecedents, does not raise issues for consultancies of introducing overly radical learning and development methods into organisations, which may be hard to market to organisations.

This discussion has focused on the first part of the process – the expectations of the consultancies and commissioners in the initial stages of tendering for and setting up the intervention, which while on the surface appear to be similar, nevertheless, show tensions between the requirements of the commissioners and the 'ideal' approach advocated by the practitioners. While there is considerable synergy between the practitioner and commissioner perspectives, it needs to be acknowledged that commissioners were unaware of the political and radical usage that was espoused initially. The final section of this chapter discussed the perceived distinctiveness of theatre-based and forum theatre interventions and the findings emphasised the importance of a relevant script, the focus on participant engagement, and the ability of theatre to depict difficult issues in a psychologically safe space, enabling both discussion and reflection to coexist, although, as previously discussed, such discussions and interactions are bounded. These features embody what might be termed the 'practice of forum theatre'; the next chapter explores how these features are realised in practice and how forum theatre events are facilitated and managed.

# Chapter 7

## The Practice of Forum Theatre

### Introduction

This chapter presents the findings relating to the second research question, *'to identify the components of forum theatre and ascertain the extent to which the process (or components of the process) support or hinder the perceived purpose from the perspective of the stakeholders'*. Chapter four identified the main features or 'components' of forum theatre processes (Figure 4.1), namely, a contextualised dramatic representation, aimed to engender engagement and identification, which in turn leads to audience participation and interaction (Babbage 2004; Boal 1995); these activities take place within a defined performance space, and aim to create a safe learning space (Babbage 2004; Fulop and Rifkin 1997) for participants. The ways in which these components are realised and the issues relating to this realisation will be explored in this chapter.

### Space and Performance

As discussed in the literature review, the theme of 'space' is a recurring one, through the actual performance space which is one moderator of individual and group participation and the subsequent development of 'learning spaces'. One of the emergent themes from the data was the importance of the facilitator in effectively turning a literal performance space into a metaphorical learning space; thus the next part of the analysis provides a discussion of how such 'spaces' are managed and developed, before considering the other forum theatre elements in more detail.

### The Performance Space

In all the events that were observed, participants entered a setting which could be best be described as a traditional theatre space, with a clearly defined area where the actors would perform. The setting up of a traditional theatre space supports the introduction to the participants of the theatrical frame – 'that which marks out the theatre event as theatre and signals how the audience will position itself and behave' (Jackson 2007 p.163). By providing a clear separation of actors and audience from the onset, this acts as a signifier to participants that the requirement, at least at the beginning, will be to observe rather than participate (Clark and Mangham 2004a). While Clark and Mangham perceive this separation as detrimental to creating an environment where open dialogue can occur, it can also be argued that most forms of applied theatre, initially at least, separate out actors and audiences and whereas some theatre-based interventions, for example, those labelled as 'work-in-progress'<sup>19</sup>, require participation from the start, '[Boal's] Forum Theatre initially allows audiences the **security** of distance

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<sup>19</sup> 'Work in progress' described activities such as role-play or drama-based workshops, often with the aim of transferring skills to the participants

and then **inspires, or provokes** [my emphasis] them to abandon this in favour of full involvement in the theatrical game' (Babbage 2004 p.68).

However, not only does the layout of the room signal the respective roles but also, where 'simultaneous dramaturgy' (that is, the participants directing the action from their seats) is used, as was the case in all the observed forum theatre events, the facilitator will also clearly state, normally as a method of reassuring the participants, that the separation will continue. This reassurance was offered within the first few minutes, seen by project managers and actor/facilitators as offering a positive start to the event.

*It's so powerful when we go into start the programme [and say] "Hi, welcome you probably know we are actors and you are probably sitting in your seats thinking 'Oh God we have to do role play'. But don't worry YOU stay in your seats" and it's great when you say that because they love that ...99 percent of them don't want to leave their seats ... you create a much better environment when you say 'WE do all the acting'. (Richard, Project Manager)*

Given the theatrical nature of the event, it is likely that some individuals may think there is a possibility of having to perform on stage, which may raise anxiety and detract attention from the overall purpose of the event. While some individuals may well be happy to participate in this way, there appears to be a general consensus among the project managers interviewed that this approach is inappropriate in an organisational setting, particularly when working with large mixed groups, and that rather than enhancing the experience for participants, it would be more likely to alienate and even humiliate – *'I think it would become much more about either, 'Look at Bob. Isn't he making a fool of himself?' or Bob feeling humiliated* (Dan, Project Manager).

There was also a belief on the part of the project managers and the actors/facilitators that the only people wanting to come on stage would be the more extrovert ones, sidelining those who had equally valid contributions. In addition, where the actors did not have experience of on-stage participation, there appeared to be some resistance to this approach, partly on the grounds that if they were participants, they would not want to come on stage, and partly because they could not see any benefits for either the individuals or the group.

*... the other interesting thing about participating forum theatre where the audience come on stage ... is that to help the person who feels moved to come up and do it? Is it about that experience of doing it or are they just performing it for the rest of the group to show them? What, who benefits? (Mike, Actor/Facilitator)*

There were references to the fact that on the whole audiences in this context have not come on a voluntary basis and therefore unlikely to be enthusiastic about coming on stage. Finally, in all the events observed, with few exceptions, the conventional way in which the seating was set up mitigated

against an easy transfer from audience to stage. Embedded in the following extract is the concern about the facilitator creating an appropriate learning environment, where people feel comfortable in their assigned roles.

*Before they come, I think one of their massive fears is the fact that they're going to have to get up there and actually perform. And, you know, telling them at the beginning that they don't have to do that, we are going to do all the acting. And I think that helps to relax them ...*  
(John, Actor/Facilitator)

This view was echoed in various ways by the majority of project managers and actors and illustrates a number of issues relating to how the participants are perceived. The issues concerning the nature of participation will be dealt with later in this section, but implicitly there is an assumption that on-stage participation is something to be feared by any 'normal' audience and to some extent was supported by participants.

*I supposed because of the forum theatre I saw before people had to go and act, and I was a bit nervous about that – so it was very good when we were reassured that we wouldn't be acting.*  
(Penny, Participant)

However, the issue of acting or going up on stage was not raised by many of the participants. This may have been because of a lack of specific participant expectations, that is, this is the first time they had encountered forum theatre, and the immediate implication from the initial set-up in a traditional theatre mode was that they would remain separate from the acting.

It should be noted that the above discussions referred to events which were targeted at the organisational level. Where forum theatre was used for skills development, the expectation was that participants would go 'on-stage'; such events tended to be aimed at managers, often as part of wider development programmes incorporating a range of activities. In some ways, this approach resonates with Boal's emphasis on the importance of creating a community, moving gradually from the familiar (the separation of actors and audience) to the unfamiliar (Jackson 1992; Babbage 2004) through a series of different activities or exercises, enabling individuals to develop confidence and trust in the group, so that they could participate safely. The role of the participant will be discussed further later in this chapter, but whichever approach is taken, the facilitator has an important role to play. The next section explores the role of the facilitator in more depth and how their approaches impact on the extent to which the aims of such events are met.

## **Difficultators or Facilitators**

You can't control people's reactions to your plays, your duty is also not to reduce people's reactions, not to give them easy handles with which they can pigeon-hole you, and come to comfortable terms with what you are saying" (David Hare 1991 p.24).

A recurring theme in the organisational and applied theatre studies literature is the emphasis on not just audience participation, but being able to intervene in the direction of the narrative in order to change the outcomes. Hare's comment supports that view that whatever the initial intentions of a theatre production might be, it is not possible to dictate the outcomes – the audience will make their own minds up and potentially come to different conclusions from what the author, director or actors intended. Transferred to forum theatre, this implies the events need to be managed in such a way that it is the participants' views that are privileged. However, in the organisational context, the intention, as identified in the previous chapter (whether or not this is made explicit) is to meet certain outcomes. Thus, far from allowing participants to sit back and take from performances whatever they wish to take, forum theatre interventions are shaped and managed by a facilitator.

It should be noted that Boal used the term 'joker' for facilitator; the term is derived from the joker in a deck of cards - just as the wild card is not tied down to a specific suit or value, 'neither is the ... joker tied down to an allegiance to performer, spectator, or any one interpretation of events' (Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman 1994, p. 237). Furthermore whereas the term 'facilitate' is usually taken to mean 'to make easy' in Boalian terms the joker is also a difficult-ator, 'undermining easy judgements, reinforcing our grasp of the complexity of the situation, but not letting that complexity get in the way of action or frighten us into submission or inactivity' (Jackson 1992 p.xix).

Boal and Jackson also place a considerable amount of emphasis on the neutrality of the joker/facilitator, through the facilitator remaining separate from the actors, to be able to stand to one side and allow the spect-actors to 'manage' the outcomes. Boal's theatre does not privilege any particular message but aims to provide a space where different and opposite points of view are aired, with the ultimate goal of promoting social and personal change through critical thinking and discussion (Babbage 2004). Thus in the organisational context this would mean not only being neutral in terms of working with the scenarios and outcomes, but also with the commissioner's perspectives.

All the forum theatre events observed had a facilitator, and, in the majority of the events, facilitation was undertaken by individuals with an acting rather than training background. However, the facilitators were not always separate from the actors; while there was a lead facilitator who introduced the sessions and provided the links, during the actual forum part of the events the actor and facilitator role tended to become blurred, as the actors were allocated small groups to work with when directing their characters. In addition, at one event, the lead facilitator took on an acting role in one of the



improvisations. Project managers had an ideal of having the facilitator separate from the acting, but recognised that, often because of resource implications, this was not always possible.

*... with Boal's work often he would have three, at least three people there ... the two actors and the joker together, what we might call the facilitator. And in the early days certainly we found that the clients couldn't afford the third, there were budgetary constraints so you only got two actors who kind of ran the whole thing. And actually that still happens a lot. (Mark, Project Manager)*

Thus there is some variation in the facilitator role, ranging from managing the session from start to finish, to stepping back during forum sessions and the actors taking over as facilitators, who directly interacted with the audience. However, the majority of those who took on the specific facilitator role had acting rather than a training background and could be employed either as actor or facilitator<sup>20</sup>.

This combining of roles seemed to be one of the most challenging issues for the facilitators. While the forum theatre methodology would appear to support a process model of facilitation, the facilitator 'acting as an objective observer and process controller' (Pellegrinelli 2002 p. 344), facilitators came with their own assumptions and perceptions of what is and is not appropriate in certain circumstances.

*... for example we had somebody today suggest that somebody put something into a role-play in the forum workshop ... the overwhelming majority of the people there today thought would be a good outcome, never mind. Let's demonstrate that this idea has no legs and don't argue the toss, don't stand there and argue with the person with this idea, show them that it's not going to work. (Drew, Actor/Facilitator)*

There appeared to be a number of tactics for 'showing them that it's not going to work' – one popular one was to exaggerate the suggestion, a move which was seen as being legitimate, firstly, to bring in some humour and secondly, to demonstrate that this suggestion would not work.

*And, and sometimes we manipulate it, that we might do it so badly, they've gone, 'Just apologise!' And of course you know what they mean and say 'I'm awfully sorry about the situation that you've found yourself in. However, it's out of my control.' And you just don't go. 'Aaaah.' or 'Sorry'. (Roz, Actor/Facilitator)*

This approach could occasionally go awry - one participant in discussing his own levels of participation, commented that the actor had not rated his suggestion so did not follow it through:

*I actually secretly felt he didn't try very hard to do [my suggestion] ... I felt he kind of sabotaged it in a way ... (Ralph, Participant)*

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<sup>20</sup> All actors interviewed both acted and facilitated and for purpose of clarity the term actor/facilitator is used throughout.

There was also an example when the actor/facilitator specifically stated what he thought should happen, which resulted in loss of credibility and even interest in exploring the issues further:

*... and one of the actors said, ' Oh no, we don't want you to do that, we want you to go down this direction.' And you could see half the team [the participants] got turned off, saying, 'this is not true, this is not real, this is just, make believe (Group Participant)*

It is clearly difficult for facilitators and actors to leave their own views behind; As one actor/facilitator commented, *'That's our job to feel how other people feel'* (Peter, Actor/Facilitator), but, this important acting skill may conflict with the joker role of standing outside the action and retaining neutrality. In addition, the shift from actor to facilitator and back again was also challenging as the following extract shows:

*I found hardest of all in the first year was making the break between now I'm performing, now I'm talking to you. Now I'm this character in a role play – I really struggled with it. Because up to that point I needed a minute to recover from being the character, sorry I just can't cut off and talk to an audience, we just don't do that. (Drew, Actor/Facilitator)*

In addition when undertaking a long-term project, there was evidence that the actors/facilitators began to anticipate audience reactions and shape the session accordingly. One commissioner saw this as being positive.

*When the actors are engaged in roles and then they stop and hear the questions from the audience, it starts to give them a feel for what are their concerns, what are the range of issues and how might they be answered ... That information goes when an actor is taken out of that role and another comes into it, so they don't know how to respond in the same way. (Julie, Commissioner)*

However, the same commissioner also commented that towards the end of the project the issue which had originally been agreed had been changed by the actors/facilitators.

*I went to one of the sessions and was quite surprised to find that to me, what appeared to be the emphasis in the debate was how do you implement this policy. Well no, that isn't what it's about... they'd lost the plot as it were. (Julie, Commissioner)*

This shift occurred as a result of a direct question to the participants, posed by the facilitator, rather than driven by the participants. Furthermore, observations towards the end of this particular programme indicated that the actors/facilitators developed a tendency to ignore suggestions from the audience and make their own suggestions, which were then taken up by the actors.

*... the facilitator was telling the audience points basically which other groups may have raised, but giving it to them rather than getting it from them which may have undermined the amount of learning that takes place – you are starting to tell me what I should be thinking ... (Julie, Commissioner)*

So it can be established that ‘selective facilitation’ occurs, a process similar to one described by Greatbatch and Dingwall (1989) in their study of divorce mediators where the mediators ‘frequently conduct themselves in ways that show they are working with notions of favored and disfavored outcomes’ (p.636), while presenting themselves as neutral by avoiding the specific or overt expression of opinions. Selective facilitation differs from agenda management, where the mediator consults with and invites participants to decide that topic has been sufficiently discussed (ibid.) and contradicts the espoused aim of ‘the audience writing the outcomes’. This finding raises the question as to whether substantive neutrality is possible within any forum theatre approach whether practised in community or organisational settings – while the latter is critiqued on the grounds of its purely instrumental purpose (Nicholson 2005) it is possible in other settings, jokers or facilitators need to manage such activities towards some type of outcome. As Schutzman (2006) notes, ‘Given that jokers ... undo hierarchies, the joker as leader – as any kind of authority – is something of an oxymoron’ (p.143).

Furthermore, participants accepted there was a need for direction and although some participants thought the facilitator was not clear enough about whether the aim was to get the issues raised or ‘solve’ the problem, concern was also expressed that the discussions and the subsequent enactments tended to go off target, particularly when there were very strong members within the group who were reluctant to listen to what other group members were suggesting or who simply wanted to solve what they perceived as the problem, without discussing the issues.

*And some people, a lot of people really, just misunderstood what, or would appear to have misunderstood what they're doing there and what the whole project was about ... if either at that point they could have been steered, you gently in the correct direction, say, 'You know, it's not really the question you should ask them, perhaps you should probe this, this and this,' that would probably have helped the day go on a lot better and not go down blind alleys (Group Participant)*

It was acknowledged by the actors that the facilitating role was a challenging one, and, when initially moving into forum theatre, was the one that they found hardest; this differentiation between being an actor and being a facilitator as well as being an individual with their own set of unique experiences led to a blurring of boundaries between the two roles. Furthermore, there was recognition by the participants that the actors/facilitators were not management experts but, at times, appeared to be moving to a more directive approach.

*[the actor] clearly got involved in the discussion about what should be done and so on ... and you started to think hang on, which role / hat is he wearing? If they step in and out of role does it start to stretch and strain the perception of what they are doing? (Nigel, Participant)*

However, the actors/facilitators were very clear that, 'there is a set of learning that the organisation wants to see pulled out of a particular scenario and they may or may not organically come from the room' (Tom, Actor/Facilitator). It is not, therefore, unreasonable, that those responsible for managing events need to manage them in such a way that they were completed in the time available, whether a couple of hours or a full day.

While the findings indicated that the project managers and actors were implicitly working with a process model of facilitation, facilitation training for the actors was generally limited:

*We got a day or two days' training maximum as forum facilitators ... some facilitators do exams in it ... I don't know, but suddenly we're in this position and unless you're a certain type of actor ... you know, you sink or swim. (Tom, Actor/Facilitator)*

However, it should be noted that the larger theatre consultancies did offer on-going development in training and facilitation skills, but it was acknowledged that it was difficult for the actors to take this up due to other commitments. In addition, a number of the project managers had invested in their own skills development, either through obtaining a formal qualification (for example, Masters in Organisational Development; Post-Graduate Certificate in Education), and/or by attending workshops in facilitating forum theatre.

There is no doubt that facilitating forum theatre events is challenging – the individuals involved in the process did not usually have a training or consultancy background, they are working in organisations of which they may have little prior knowledge, and there was a lack of clarity about the expectations of the participants and the extent to which, as facilitators, they could bring their own assumptions and values to the events. Gregory and Romm (2001) suggest this subjectivity needs to be acknowledged and that rather than attempting to retain neutrality, facilitators are better employed in engaging in what they term 'critical facilitation' (p.457) firstly by being aware of their own values and belief systems and secondly, being willing to expose their contributions to challenges from others. As Berry (1993) comments, 'by withholding their personal perspectives on content or process, facilitators may prevent important information from reaching the group's awareness' (p.31). While the actor/facilitator may not necessarily have expertise in the content, the role could be developed further through acting as a 'difficultator' rather than facilitator, drawing attention to the complexity of organisational issues, rather than, as suggested previously, managing the outcomes towards specific solutions.

The next section explores the use of the dramatic representations, whether scripted or improvised, and considers the extent to which the participants engaged or identified with the process. The section also explores participants' experiences of moving from spectating to active participation<sup>21</sup>.

## Identification and distance

### Telling a Story : The Dramatic Representation

A play should make you understand something new. If it tells you what you already know, you leave as ignorant as when you went in. (*Our Country's Good* Act 2 Scene 7 p.74)

Given that one of the espoused purposes of introducing drama into the workplace is to trigger discussion and dialogue within the organisation, narrative has an important role to play in forum theatre, by enabling engagement with an issue, as well as providing the means of communicating shared experiences and meanings.

As discussed in the previous chapter, consultancies will typically draw the dramatic material partly or wholly from the initial discussions with the commissioners of the event, and to a more limited extent, from discussions with individuals or groups of staff, resulting in a series of narratives which may be presented either as an actual representation of the organisation or a parallel universe. The outcome is a narrative or series of narratives related to the issues, sometimes developed using improvisational methods, into storylines which are then presented to the audience. An alternative approach is to present a pre-written play designed to work in a number of different organisational settings so that it is relevant but not specific to the organisation although some customisation may take place.

Understandably the project managers were keen for the script not only to represent and reflect the organisational issues, but needed to it work as a piece of theatre.

*... we had a job for Company X which was the launch of ... well, from my point of view, an incredibly dull piece of technical equipment. And they started off by writing us a script which was extraordinarily dull ... so, "Good morning, I've got the new RXB 500" ... "What does it do?", "It does"... And we eventually rewrote it to make it more ... funny ... (Mark, Project Manager)*

There has been limited reference in the organisational theatre literature to the use of humour in forum theatre, yet it was raised at a number of points, as noted in the previous chapter, by practitioners, commissioners and participants. In the context of the above extract, humour, is seen as stimulating interest in what otherwise might be potentially dull content, with the aim of enhancing the learning

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<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that of the three events explored with the participants, all consultancies employed 'simultaneous dramaturgy'. Therefore the term spect-actor is not appropriate for this type of participation.

environment (Bryant et al. 1980). However, humour has other functions, the most relevant ones in the context of this research being creating social cohesion and managing embarrassment and stress (relief theories) (Clark and Greatbatch 2003); previous studies ‘powerfully demonstrate that people use humour to accomplish important objectives’ (ibid. p.1518) and this is reflected in the earlier discussions on the role of the facilitator, where humour was used by the actors/facilitators in order to manage the discussion towards a specified outcome, while retaining participant engagement.

The classic dramatic narrative will involve the protagonist (in Boalian terms the oppressed person), often the main character of the play, through whom the themes of the play are expressed and who undertakes a journey over the duration of the play to overcome some obstacle or situation, the ‘*fictional journey*’, as cited the following extract, resonating with Cole’s (1975) present and imaginative truth:

*... and the other thing forum theatre is so good at is showing you the future... we did one ... about the introduction of the new technology; this was very much about showing this is the situation at the moment, lets follow a little journey, that our fictional heroine is going to go on and see where she ends up. And so because people could empathise with her ... they could follow the line and say I see that’s where we are aiming in the future and we can see the sort of change we need to go through to get there.. So that’s about showing the past and about showing the future... (Tony, Project Manager)*

However, it should be noted that one of the difficulties plays presented in the organisational context is, because of time or budgetary constraints, there may be insufficient time to fully develop a rounded set of characters, resulting in characters in such plays becoming stereotypes, hindering audience engagement and identification.

*So while it [the drama] was a vehicle to bring out discussion around the issues I think it left me a bit cold ... I don’t know what we got out of it, maybe laughing at stereotypes. (Fran, Participant)*

However, while other participants also saw this scenario as being stereotypical, at the same time they could see the rationale for this approach – ‘*the characters were probably a bit over the top ... but you probably need to have it larger than life to deal with the issues*’ (Penny, Participant). However, the longer and more developed production tended to produce a more positive reaction. While the latter similarly was written to present the issues to be later discussed, the approach was more subtle. The play was not a representation of the organisation, but the storyline embedded the issues under consideration. By virtue of length alone the first play did indeed take the audience on a journey, providing a strong narrative and having time to explore the characters in more depth.

*I enjoyed the fact that it was scripted to reveal more and more as it went on, so from thinking one set of things about what's happening... actually by the end of it you're actually thinking*

*different things about the characters than we thought in the beginning ... I thought that was really clever. (Group Participant)*

Furthermore, participants at this event recognised the characters, even though the setting for the play was outside the organisation, as the following extract shows:

*I used to have a manager years ago who was very similar to that character and it kind of hit home because he was quite a bully, very aggressive, but unknown to me he did have a lot of personal things going on in his life. (Group Participant)*

The consultancy who offered this production as part of a full-day event (that is the production and hotseating in the morning was followed by a forum workshop in the afternoon) would also offer a half-day event, omitting the afternoon forum workshop; this was used by one commissioner I interviewed, on the basis that that the play, coupled with the hot-seating activity, was sufficient to engage and raise the issues without using the forum workshop. However, this approach, while providing an opportunity to discuss the issues through the hotseating activity, does not enable alternative or multiple narratives to emerge (Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman 2006), an important part of the process of forum theatre.

On the basis of the above discussion, what role do these narratives actually play? As suggested previously, it is not enough simply to present a message – didactic theatre, as noted earlier in the discussion on Brecht’s work, can result in not fully engaging its audiences and as noted previously, one of the espoused uses of organisational and forum theatre is to facilitate thinking and engagement with a particular issue, which in turn leads to discussion among the participants. Engagement with the process and the issues therefore appears to be a key issue from the perspective of the providers, which is intended to stimulate the audience into becoming participants. It is not sufficient for the participants to watch a performance, they are required to have a role in deciding the outcomes. If there is no engagement with the opening part of the event, there will be limited interest in discussing the issues raised.

It is clear from the consultancies and commissioners that the aim of the narratives, whether in relation to the initial play, sketch or drama, or in relation to the forum workshops is to stimulate engagement and identification. Whereas Brecht asked his audiences to step back and think, in forum theatre audiences are being asked to think and feel. Without this stimulation of emotion it is unlikely that participants, who, as it needs to be remembered, are not attending on a voluntary basis, would be sufficiently motivated to move from being spectator to participant, albeit participating from their seats.

The next section thus moves on to explore the nature of participation in forum theatre events. As discussed, the assumption by theatre consultancies is that the dramatic representation needs to arouse sufficient interest in either the issue or the characters for meaningful participation to take place. The next section explores what participation means in this context, what type of interactions actually take

place and to how are such interactions managed to maximise the potential for robust debate, while retaining control over the event itself.

### **From Audience to Participant**

‘It is more important to have a good debate rather than a good solution’ (Boal 1992 p.230)

Debate and discussion underpin forum theatre and, the majority of the consultancies used ‘simultaneous dramaturgy’ rather than ‘pure’ forum – that is, participants intervening in the drama or interacting with actors from their seats, rather than coming up onto the stage. Forum theatre, broadly speaking, follows the experiential learning model, whereby the audience have the experience, albeit second-hand, and are offered the opportunity to reflect on what they have observed, before moving to debating openly the different outcomes, and putting those suggestions into action through the actors. Participation may of course start at the point of input into the script, whether this is before the event (normally through the theatre consultancies canvassing employees on their views which, in turn, inform the dramatic representations) or during the event through improvisation of material which is then used by the professional actors to develop a piece of theatre.

The following table of differing methods is reproduced here with an analysis of potential participant involvement. Here participation is interpreted as enabling discussion and dialogue rather than ‘shaping the outcomes’, though clearly the greater the opportunities for participation, the more likely it is that the participants will be able to explore a variety of solutions. Adapting Nissley et al’s (2004) framework of ‘control of role/control of script’ (p.823), Table 7.1 reproduces the forms of forum theatre with an assessment of the levels of the control that organisational participants have over role, script and outcomes.



**Table 7.1 Forum theatre methods and levels of participation**

Method/Form	Opportunities For Participant Involvement		
	<i>Control of role</i>	<i>Control of script</i>	<i>Control of outcomes</i>
1. Presentation of an organisationally specific dramatic representation followed by hot-seating of actors in character to trigger a discussion of the issues.	No	No	No
2. Presentation of play scene by scene, <i>'do one scene and then stop it and at the end of the scene say what do you think and then work on that scene and take the story further'</i> and then present the next scene as if the intervention had not happened (to avoid having to pre-empt the outcomes of the audience interventions before they happen).	No	To some extent	To some extent
3. Two or three actors playing out a scene in improvisational mode, directed by the audience in their seats (this might be done as a stand-alone activity or as a follow-on from the plays using the same characters but in a different setting)	No	To some extent	To some extent
4. As 2. or 3. above with the participants being asked to come up and take part on stage	Yes	To some extent	To some extent
5. The participants improvising their own material and professional or organisational actors developing a piece of theatre based on participants' ideas and 'forum-ing' the outcome	Yes	Yes	Yes

As noted previously (Table 6.1 p.95), each of above methods were cited by practitioners as being examples of what they marketed as forum theatre, but the participant role changes according to the structure of the event. In Table 7.1 above, 'control of role' refers to the extent to which (organisational) participants become 'organisational actors', that is taking over the role from the professional actors. Thus, where participants remain in their seats, only partial control of role can be assumed. Control of script relates to the extent to which participants have input into the dramatic

representation, either as part of the commissioning process, or in the event itself. In relation to pre-event activities, the previous chapter identified the use of research with potential participants to identify the issues which would then be embodied in the script. However, if an event is being performed on an ongoing basis with the aim of reaching up to 1000 employees, (in the case explored by Meisiek and Barry 2007), it is not going to be possible for all members of the audience to have had input into the script. If the contextualised script is the vehicle for participation, this would indicate the need for forum theatre scripts, as a minimum requirement, to be co-scripted. However, it is questionable how much input participants have in reality; while to some extent the scripts drew on participants' lived experiences to develop the issues, the actual scripts remained, in the majority of cases, pre-defined. In the event itself, control of script is linked to control of outcomes – therefore, in the majority of events, the extent to where there is control of script, there will also be control of outcomes. However, this control, in reality, is mediated by the degree to which the event is contained and managed by the facilitators, as discussed in the previous section. Thus, audience participation is not synonymous with 'endogenously shaping the outcomes' (Meisiek and Barry 2007 p.1808) and, as discussed previously, there are clearly tensions between the need for the actors/facilitators to shape both the agenda and the outcomes to meet the requirements of the organisation and allowing the participants to take the discussion where they think it should go. It can be also argued that the pre-scripted material, which is the starting point of forum/interactive theatre, constrains rather than expands the subsequent discussions as, by definition, the agenda is being set through the script.

In terms of the sessions, the majority of participants interviewed claimed to have participated in some way, either by commentating and directing the actors during the improvised session or actively reflecting on the discussion during or after the event, although, particularly with the focus groups, this is probably not unexpected given that the interviewees self-selected and therefore it would be assumed that they were more engaged with the process. It is also worth noting that participants will react in non-verbal ways, for example laughing or clapping, or, alternatively demonstrating lack of interest through their body language. Such reactions were noted and responded to by the actors/facilitators:

*They're nodding ... you see their, their eyes, definitely they're concentrating and they're focusing on what's going on. They don't necessarily, not everybody wants to express themselves in front of other people ... the quiet ones are just as engaged. (Jim, Actor/Facilitator)*

However, from the discussions with the participants who had taken part in forum theatre workshops, it was generally believed that the play performance and subsequent discussions did draw people in, stimulate discussion and lower defensive behaviour. There was a perception that people could say anything - 'I actually liked it that [the facilitators] didn't say 'You can't say that' (Group Participant) without repercussions to themselves, and as one participant commented 'I can't think of a better way of allowing participation without putting us on the spot, or getting everyone to participate without feeling exposed' (Ralph, Participant). One view from participants was that when people said things

that were perceived to be inappropriate, this was seen to be valuable, enabling participants to reflect on their colleagues' view. Such comments also resulted in individuals testing such views against their own, part of the ongoing process of sense-making. The participants felt that this type of discussion was unlikely to occur in more conventional learning and development events, where, as one participant suggested, an inappropriate comment *'kills the conversation dead with everyone going (sound of intake of breath) and the whole thing goes dead'* (Group Participant).

There was also real enthusiasm from the actors/facilitators for provoking the participants to express their feelings

*... but I've seen real passion and real anger or real, even, tears. I find that fascinating. It's great. (Mike, Actor/Facilitator)*

Thus considerable emphasis is placed on interaction between the participants, facilitators and actors although, as noted previously, it is possible to actively participate without verbal interaction, by engaging and reflecting. However, although not commented on by participants, in one long- running programme I observed, much of the discussion was directly between the facilitator and participants – inter-, rather than intra-discussions. This appeared to occur more in the later events I observed; this supports the view, discussed in the previous section, that in long-term events there is a danger that the actor/facilitator increasingly moves from an enabling to managing role, possibly sub-consciously, lessening the opportunities for participants to debate the issues among themselves.

There is an acknowledged tension running through forum theatre interventions, highlighted by the comparison with not only the Boalian methodology but also applied theatre models, and in the development of forum theatre events, two competing needs have to be reconciled. Firstly, the need to enable a pluri-vocal, non-hierarchical space where participants can safely discuss and consider important organisational issues, and, secondly, the need to provide a structure in order that the initial outcomes, normally defined by the commissioners, are met.

But of course one of the difficulties around encouraging participation – *'they can say anything and do anything'* (Dan, Project Manager) is that from the participants' perspective, on occasions there was a preference for perhaps less participation. Concerns were expressed that those who had the strongest views, or could see what they perceived to quick solutions and were also the most confident at speaking up tended to take over the proceedings.

*I think they were trying to recreate a situation that might happen in real life in that you might have confrontation in the workplace. But ... I think it all went rapidly off at a tangent where strong characters of each group were, sort of, monopolising the discussion ... they all went on the aggressive path and there was none of this, you know, 'hang on, you know, let's actually listen to what you want to say first. Don't put a solution forward ...' . (Group Participant)*

## Managing the Learning Space

The issue of control was discussed in chapter six, in relation both to the commissioning of forum theatre events and, earlier in this chapter, the facilitator role. However, side-by-side with the recurring references to control, is the emphasis, particularly by the project managers and actors/facilitators on what they term the risky nature of forum theatre. How those managing forum theatre events reconcile control with the open-ended, and risky (from the perspective of the actors/facilitators in particular) nature of theatre events is considered here.

### Defining and Managing Risk

The comment – ‘*they can ask anything and they can say anything*’ (Dan, Project Manager) may well be how those providing the sessions view *the* ideal, but this sits uncomfortably beside the comment from another project manager that ‘*I am ultimately there for the client ...they say ‘We want to spend money on this intervention in **this** organisation to bring about **these** outcomes ... so I am in the hands of the client*’ (Richard, Project Manager).

Thus the first risk is that the event will not be managed effectively and the outcomes will not be met. While project managers were clear about ‘being there for the organisation’ and therefore, it is supposed, the commissioners, there is also an acknowledgement that there are tensions in this approach. One project manager articulated these tensions in discussing the nature of audience participation, expressing concern that, aside from the assumption that on-stage participation would militate against an effective learning environment, there was also concern about loss of control.

*And this guy got up... and took over and one I thought ‘I’ve lost all control now’ and he was a windbag and he wasn’t very good at the acting and he went off on his own agenda. And I kind of lost control. So there are two issues. I don’t want somebody getting up and me losing control of the session, but I have to make a comment on what I’ve just said, because if I say ‘it’s interactive theatre and I do what the audience say’ and then on the other hand say ‘I want control’ that sounds paradoxical, but in actual fact we do control the outcomes, because I’m selecting which bits I’m going to do. (Richard, Project Manager)*

It has already been noted that the performance space itself potentially restricted debate and discussion on an equal footing; the above extract suggests that those responsible for facilitating the events, see that control over the performance space equates with control over the learning space, that is, the safe space where robust debate can occur but was, nevertheless, still subject to being managed. Nevertheless, there was an expectation by the practitioners that their work would create a metaphorical space where different kinds of conversations could take place and diverse possibilities be explored, but within the parameters as defined by them. However, from the actor/facilitator perspective, part of the interest in

working with forum theatre stemmed from the enjoyment of using theatre to actively engage with participants' feelings and emotions.

*I don't think it is safe. No. Should be ... challenging, provoking [and] the means to open out to the forum to actually discuss ... I don't think it is a safe way. I think it is a very provocative way and a very quick way of getting into how people are feeling and how to deal with these feelings (Peter, Actor/Facilitator)*

This was as a recurring theme throughout the interviews with the actors, implying that forum theatre is a risky activity, full of potential danger for the facilitators, as they work with the participants. However, it was not fully articulated what the actual danger was, although one example was provided of an unintended outcome, albeit for the actors rather than participants:

*We did have one actor doing "I'm going to stand up and walk out. I just have had enough". A black actress playing a black role ... tired of a week's worth of fairly blatant racism coming towards her, just got up and said, "I can't deal with it." (Dan, Project Manager)*

The project manager above went on to comment that this reaction by the actress may have been caused by a lack of control on the part of the facilitator, either by not providing enough support over the course of the week or by not intervening in the discussion at an earlier point. Thus, paradoxically the themes of risk and danger, of freedom and democratisation sit close to the need to control the event not only to meet the needs of the commissioners, but also to prevent the kind of occurrence cited above when the actors are themselves influenced or even harmed by this participation.

However, what does risk mean in this context? There has already been considerable discussion about on-stage participation, and this is one aspect of 'risk' that is carefully managed; as noted previously, on-stage participation is risky for the individual, partly in terms of potentially making a fool of themselves, either through inappropriate interaction or even what is perceived as 'poor acting'. The notion of not being able to act as a reason for not allowing people on stage is interesting as, arguably, these individuals may be performing, but if they are being their authentic selves, then there should not be a need to 'act' another part. However, where forum (that is, on-stage participation) was used, the facilitators were aware of the need to set-up the activity in such a way that those who did come on-stage felt that their efforts would not be ridiculed by their colleagues. One actor/facilitator described how the lead facilitator set up an initial exercise, *'a really bad magic act, that failed on purpose and he became the person who failed [making participation] ok for failure, or for vulnerability. It's very important ... especially for people who don't perform and because they're with their peers, it can be very intimidating to say [on-stage] what would you do in that situation?'* (James, Actor/Facilitator).

Another example was to use humour to raise the energy levels, by, for example, misrepresenting a suggestion from the floor. However, unlike the previous examples, this was done in order to encourage

people in the audience to come up on stage and show (rather than describe) what was intended, potentially empowering participants rather than controlling:

*... so eventually we'd say, come and show us and that was usually with enough energy so they would come. And then we'd get two or three people to come along and represent the boss or the accountant and we'd always applaud them, get feedback from the audience as to what they had done really well, what they would take away from it (Paul, Project Manager)*

Thus energy levels were raised through humour, and trust was gained through easing the participants into the 'mindset' that active participation was part of the experience, ensuring that such participation was a positive experience. These contrasting perspectives are interesting, as constructing safety and risk seems to lie as much, if not more, in the mindset of those running the events, as those who take part. One commissioner offered a clear distinction between challenge and safety,

*Safe means that organisationally there is no comeback for them in terms of the whole process. Coming out of their comfort zone means that we are challenging them, in terms of some of their fundamental behaviours in order to bring about some individual changes. (Linda, Commissioner)*

The 'no comeback' theme was re-iterated in discussions with the providers. The actors are the conduit for the emotions and as one actor suggested cannot be 'hurt' by the comments. This was recognised by participants as well – '*...you're sort of given an opportunity to [challenge others] without the consequences ... as if George was your manager*' (Group Participant).

Several practitioners distinguished between 'good' danger in which there is open debate and discussion and people are being challenged and 'bad' danger where the debate disintegrates into inappropriate or insulting behaviour.

*... make sure that it is a safe place in which to work, a safe space to be able to reveal yourself like that emotionally without anybody using violent language, personal language. So I think there is, there is a part of us that knows that we need to keep the space physically and emotionally safe, although it may become uncomfortable or difficult, we hope it will get right down to the nub of an issue. (Sally, Actor/Facilitator)*

Such comments resonate with Taylor's (2008) reference to psychological safety, where 'those who would change must feel safe enough about the possibility of change to get past their own fear of change' (p.402). Thus the construct of risk differs according to individual perspectives, from invoking feelings of anxiety and high degrees of emotion as cited by Schreyögg (2001), to being able to use the actors as the means of criticising individual or organisational practice, with none of the potential consequences if actual policies or behaviour were challenged. None of the participants raised the

former as a concern, probably because those responsible for the event have ensured that measures are in place to minimise risk – by doing so, it needs to be recognised that interventions may not be as challenging as the practitioners’ rhetoric would suggest. Furthermore, as will be discussed in the next section, organisational norms may also impact on the extent to which participants will challenge either what is perceived as the views of management or even the views of their colleagues.

### **Social Acceptability**

Control over the discussion did not always come from the facilitators; both management and peer control limit the extent to which individuals feel free to ‘speak their mind’. One participant attended an event which was part of an induction day and felt that everyone was working hard to display what they perceived as the ‘correct’ behaviours:

*Well everyone was saying the right things, you know, ... and I just felt everyone was behaving themselves, you know as part of this induction day. And the CEO had come along ... (Susan, Participant)*

Similarly, a project manager had the experience, perhaps extreme, where the presence of senior management had a significant impact on the event:

*... and in the first afternoon ... it went pretty well in the morning, ... the president of the organisation was sitting there. So there were about 40 people including the president and nobody said a bloody thing (Richard, Project Manager)*

It would seem that however hard the facilitators and the actors work to create a pluri-vocal learning space, the organisational culture will have a significant impact on the extent to which participants do, in reality, feel confident enough to make contributions which may conflict with their colleagues’ views. It is not only the presence of management which may stifle debate, but also the prevailing norms of what is and is not acceptable in terms of conflict and confrontation. This was evidenced by a commissioner who noted that:

*One person had very strong views about having a gay teacher teaching their child, then other members of the audience went, 'What!??' and making other kind of comments and were wanting to challenge but weren't, were making comments, mutterings between each other. And then in the other kind of discussion groups people tend to not want to confront other people. (Jane, Project Manager)*

However it should be remembered that this is theatre in the organisational context – while a number of forum theatre commissioners said that employee attendance was voluntary, notably for the organisation wide events, the participants believed that there was an expectation by their own managers that they

should attend. While this point has been noted by commentators the implications for participants has not been fully considered. Firstly, as noted previously, there is the ethical dimension relating to the extent to which it is appropriate to expect participants to express emotional responses in the workplace environment (Meisiek 2004). Secondly, there is an issue of ongoing relationships: to what extent is it reasonable to expect people to challenge and confront each other vociferously when they need to maintain working relationships beyond the sessions – thus, as the example of legislative theatre provided in the previous chapter shows, the context will clearly be a mediator in relation to the depth of the discussions and the willingness of participants to engage in robust debate.

## **Conclusion**

Thus an examination of the relationship between the providers and participants indicated that, while the espoused aim in terms of the process is one of equality, in reality there is a tension between the desire by the providers to have an open forum and endogenously shaped outcomes, and the recognition that the client has specific outcomes that need to be met. Thus, as identified in the previous chapter, allowing the participants to shape the event and outcomes clearly has implications for the providers in terms of their ongoing business relationship with commissioning managers.

While the organisational studies literature suggests that it is the participant perspective that leads the process and the outcomes are defined by participants rather than management, closer examination shows a clear tension between the espoused theory and theory-in-use (Argyris and Schon 1991). The methods of working, the outcomes and the way in which the latter unfold are crucially influenced by the power relationships between the various stakeholder groups. What perhaps is unusual about organisational theatre is the number of stakeholders involved - there are four parties engaged in the process, namely, the commissioners the directors/project managers who tender for the project, the actors/facilitators who deliver the product and the participants themselves, all of whom bring different expectations to the process.

Thus both before and at the start of such events, the participants, facilitators and actors arrive with a set of assumptions that are expressed through the way the events are set up. For example, participants unfamiliar with theatre conventions may not have even considered the possibility of participating on stage or be concerned about it. But the layout of the rooms indicates as soon as they arrive that there will be separation and distance between them and the stage action. Those managing the event also hold a set of expectations based on their previous experiences, including what seem to be fairly entrenched positions regarding how the participants should behave and what their likely responses will be to the scenarios<sup>22</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> From observation of a rehearsal for a forum theatre event not only were the scenarios rehearsed but also possible responses from participants were both anticipated and rehearsed.



The role of the facilitator emerged as being key, but little attention appears to have been paid to this role in the organisational theatre literature, an omission given that in the Boalian methodology the joker is a key player in supporting the process (Jackson 1992; Schutzman 2006). While, on the one hand, there appeared to be a desire to take a neutral role, the findings did not support this in reality. Thus, while the literature, and indeed the espoused intentions of the practitioners support the development of democratised spaces, in reality, only certain outcomes will be achieved or certain messages communicated; in other words, a space that is not so democratic after all but one in which the possibility of learning is predominantly pre-determined – the existing organisational paradigm may be changed but in a manner which is principally controlled by managers (Rae and Wagstaff 2008). Furthermore there appears to be the potential for considerable ambiguity on the part of the actors in particular, as they are, in this process, likely to be subject to expectations and pressures which are at best contradictory and potentially conflicting. They are supposed to be operating in a democratic space and yet are expected to contribute to outcomes which achieve predetermined organisational outcomes. They are briefed by their own managers on those outcomes and yet have to respond to the live direction of participants during the process and, in addition, come to the event with their own perceptions, views and attitudes. Furthermore, they are bringing their own experiences both as individuals and as actors, having taken part in previous similar events, which in turn shape their own responses. The findings show that the relationship between participants and actor/facilitators is situated within a more complex set of relationships each with its own attendant power relationships. Further it can be seen that each of the groups involved both influences and is influenced by other groups, either directly at or second-hand, as in the case of actors being briefed on the commissioners' expectations by their own managers.

Thus, an examination of the relationship between the practitioners and participants indicated that while the espoused aim in terms of the process is one of 'anything goes', in reality there is considerable tension between the underpinning belief system of facilitating genuinely open forums and the recognition that the client has specific outcomes that need to be met. Allowing participants to shape the event and outcomes, without some form of management, clearly has implications for the providers in terms of their ongoing business relationship with commissioning managers and the expectations and experience of project managers, actors and participants are shaped and shape each other prior to and during the event to keep the outcomes bounded rather than open-ended.

However, such tensions are inherent in any event that aims to open up discussion and dialogue among the workforce. Burgoyne and Jackson (1997) in their discussion of enabling more pluralist approaches to management development, note that 'management can serve to make the arena work by increasing the chances that important differences are aired and that opportunities for compromise and synergy are not lost' (p.61), even though they acknowledge that such 'management' may be problematical in terms of risking reversion to a more unitarist space. Furthermore, it can also be argued that the forum theatre participants themselves felt empowered to shape the event and the outcomes to some extent, and that the organisers are not only responding to the commissioners but to the participants. Participants did engage with the action, identify with the issues and felt empowered to express their views. The

reactions of the participants will be explored further in the next chapter, which considers the impact and outcomes of forum theatre interventions from the management and participant perspective.

## Chapter 8

### Impact and Outcomes

#### Introduction

When does a session of the Theatre of the Oppressed end? Never – since the objective is not to close a cycle, generate a catharsis, or to end a development. On the contrary, its objective is to encourage autonomous activity, to set a process in motion, to stimulate transformative creativity, to change spectators into protagonists (Boal 1992 p.275)

This final analysis chapter explores the outcomes of forum theatre and the extent to which the initial expectations (where they exist) of commissioners and participants are met and addresses the third research question, *‘to explore the impact of forum theatre from an organisational and individual perspective’*.

Inherent within any discussion on learning and development activities, and perhaps even more so in theatre- and drama- based work, is the ‘problem of evaluation’. As discussed in previous chapters, while the commissioners and the project managers have a set of learning outcomes they wish to achieve, nevertheless the learning outcomes are not always clearly stated to the participants. In theatre terms this makes sense – a dramatic representation, followed by open-ended discussion, leaving participants to take what they want to from the event is, arguably, the essence of theatre. However, there is a tension between the nature of theatre and drama itself and the intentionality of applied theatre, and, as noted previously, evaluation of organisational theatre, or indeed any arts-based intervention, is not well covered in the academic literature; with the exception of Meisiek and Barry (2007) there appears to be little attempt to undertake systematic evaluation of such events either of a quantitative or qualitative nature. While as noted in chapter four, arts-based interventions have been subject to evaluations, the more rigorous reviews tend to remain unpublished (see Greatbatch et al. 2005). As Antal (2009) notes, ‘Research has not kept pace with these developments in practice. Very few empirical studies have been conducted to establish whether the high hopes placed on these interventions are justified’ (p.5).

As noted in chapter four, evaluation of learning events is a continuing issue in learning and development; while, as is frequently noted, evaluating a training session on, for example, an IT application, is relatively straightforward (either the learner can operate the application or they cannot), development activities are more problematic. This is partly because of the longer-term nature of such activities and partly because the outcomes of such events are not necessarily couched in terms that are easy to assess, such as raising awareness. The study, undertaken by Meisiek and Barry (2007), of a long-term forum theatre initiative, addressed these issues in a number of ways, through using a range of measures both at an individual and organisational level. Specifically, they aimed to address the use

of theatre as an analogy, with a focus on how and extent to which the event was discussed afterwards, and how the commissioning organisation was affected over time by the initiative; their findings will be compared and contrasted with the findings from this research.

The first part of this chapter discusses the views of the project managers and commissioners in relation to undertaking evaluation. The extent to which the issues are discussed after the intervention itself, and whether there was any action taken by the participants or the commissioners are considered in the second part of this chapter. Finally, the extent to which these events are followed up is explored, the extent to which managers implemented additional opportunities to explore the issues and whether participants continued to engage with the process after the event.

## **The Problem of Evaluation**

### **Evaluating Effectiveness**

Both project managers and commissioners saw evaluation as a real issue. As one project manager commented:

*(Evaluation) is the biggest dilemma – and if I could do it in a scientific way that proved our interventions bring about improvements in the bottom line, (laughter), we'd be 10 times bigger than we are ... it's the problem of evaluating behavioural change which is not as easy as evaluating the acquiring of a skill. (Richard, Project Manager)*

a comment echoed by others:

*... evaluation is generally a nightmare. It's a nightmare particularly if you think about some of the work we do, for instance, around creativity. How do you measure someone's creativity? You can't measure it before the workshop, you can't measure it after. (Tony, Project Manager)*

In both these extracts there is an emphasis on functionalist approaches to evaluation, with the interest in scientific measurements, which would, in theory, enable the theatre consultancies to be able to cite a return on investment, thus increasing their credibility. However, forum theatre, particularly when targeted at the organisational level, is a development rather than training activity (although, as noted in chapter six, is often publicised as a training event) and therefore any changes are likely to be subtle, and there may be a significant period of time before any effects may show (Mabey and Finch-Lees 2008). Furthermore, such interventions may be accompanied or supported by other human resource management activities, making it challenging to isolate one (short) event as being the cause of change.

Thus a tension is created by the need for commissioners to assess whether the interventions brought about the changes looked for, which conflicts with the longer-term nature of both the change being sought (in the case of organisational interventions) and the intervention itself, as acknowledged by one project manager:

*I think ... well, speaking from my own experience, it can take quite a long time for the message to go from where it enters cerebrally for it to really penetrate my being for it to become part of my behaviour. That can be quite a long journey. (Mark, Project Manager)*

This comment resonates with the views of Taylor (2003) and Adrian Jackson (cited in Babbage 2004), that applied and organisational theatre interventions cannot be expected to provoke immediate action and change. This would imply the need for real consideration of how longer-term effects can be evaluated, although, as will be seen in the next section, such approaches do not appear to have been considered fully by the commissioners.

## **Methods and Measures**

Having explored some of the issues relating to measuring outcomes, this does not mean that commissioners and project managers do not try to evaluate the outcomes. The methods used differed in relation to the extent to which the forum theatre event was designed as a skills transfer activity or an organisational wide event. Commissioners of organisational-wide events relied mainly on the post-event questionnaire, asking questions about levels of satisfaction in relation to content, pace and effectiveness of the venue on a five point scale. One questionnaire reviewed had three potentially leading questions, as they invited positive rather than negative responses. In addition, the questions were difficult to operationalise – thus, for example, a statement such as *'the play had a positive impact'* leads to the question as to how 'positive' is constructed by the participants. In addition the three post-event questionnaires reviewed all included a question about whether participants would take any practical actions as a result. One set of data stated that 86 per cent of participants confirmed they would be taking positive action, but it is difficult to see how such a hypothetical question would have much validity. As one participant commented:

*... it (the forum theatre event) wasn't tight enough to make you feel like you went away with something that you could then think, 'I'll implement this or I'll do this or I'll tackle this' ... (so) it's what you're taking away, it's not the willingness to do it or not, it's actually what you're taking away ... and by not ticking [the box], you're showing that you're not willing. That might not be the case, it's just that you haven't got anything to take away? (Group Participant)*

Project managers, however, were aware that the tick box approach to post-event evaluation is not an indicator of the overall effectiveness, and recognised the limitations:

*... we get people to fill in happy sheets, all score very highly one because it is drama based and its bound to compared with any other form of training ... evaluation sheets don't tell us that much other than how marvellous we are (laughter) which is what we love to hear but we need to know how we can keep improving this. So there's still a bit of work to do on all that because I don't know how you evaluate emotional or behavioural learning (Mark, Project Manager)*

Commissioners struggled with whether and how behavioural or emotional learning could be measured, and while providing some examples of longer-term approaches to evaluation, these were limited. The few examples cited included an attitude survey which would be compared with the previous year's attitude survey – this approach is relatively common with organisational-wide initiatives and while may provide some relevant indicators, are unlikely to highlight changes which can be linked specifically to the forum theatre event. In relation to a forum theatre event on diversity, there was a proposal to monitor the agendas for departmental meetings – *'and we will be able to track whether its making an impact as we can go back to minutes of departmental meetings, in six months time, do we have diversity on the agenda?'* (Julie, Commissioner). However, even if the type and length of the discussions were also monitored, the extent to which any actual change would still be challenging to assess.

Self-evaluation was also used; a number of commissioners and project managers cited the practice of asking participants to develop an action plan and one group of participants was sent an email reminder one month after the event. However, as one participant commented:

*You've just reminded me there were personal goals ... I had an email. This is the first time I thought of it since I went on the day. You've reminded me that I can't remember how specific the goals were, or what they were or when they were or whether they were reviewable, so I can't honestly say to you I have personally executed any of them. (Robert, Participant)*

A more specific example was given by a commissioner who had used forum theatre for a performance management / appraisal training event, where the participants had to come up with action plans at the end of the day, which then became part of their performance appraisal. Two issues arise here – while, as was the case here, this might be possible with a small group, with some of the larger groups of up to a hundred, it is difficult to see how this might be feasible. Secondly, once again, this type of evaluation activity assumes that forum theatre can lead to an immediate outcome, which, as previously discussed, may not always be the case – or rather the 'quick' reactions and demand for immediate action plans does not sit comfortably with the potential need for reflection and further discussion (Jackson 2007; Taylor 2003). As one participant commented, echoing the project manager cited earlier:

*The previous one [a pilot session], they asked for feedback straight away and I said, 'It's too soon, I know it's emotional, I know I enjoyed it but I'm not sure what the long-term benefit's going to be, if any. (Group Participant)*

Only two project managers cited specific examples of additional evaluation following on from the intervention; both had used similar methods, namely group discussions normally three to four months after the event specifically to review whether any specific actions had been taken. The result of one of these evaluations, as one project manager noted, was felt to be rather inconclusive since the outcome was that *'they decided to talk to each other in a more constructive and friendly way!'* (Mark, Project Manager), perhaps not being as cutting edge as might be desired by the commissioners, and unlikely to provide much support for using similar methods in future.

Informal evaluation for skills-based events tended to take the form of observations and follow-up telephone calls to participants:

*... we did a 'let's now go and see the quality of the conversations that are taking place', literally pick a random sample of people, pick up the phone to them and ask them what they had learnt from them, what was still sticking, some of the stuff they had thought about at the time and hadn't got round to and to talk us through a particular conversation and then asked them what they thought had been a difficult conversation and what had come out of the outcome and then we asked permission to speak to the individual [who they had had the conversation with. (Katherine, Commissioner)*

Project managers also used anecdotal comments from commissioners, and the following extract was one of several examples provided where characters appeared to make their way into organisational conversations:

*... and a few weeks after we did this I went in to talk to the managing director about how it had gone and what the reaction had been and he said "It's great, because the character in the play was called Hans, he has become a code word for poor customer service". Because it was funny it became a sort of joke. So if someone says "You've just done a Hans ..." (Tony, Project Manager)*

This on its own does not provide 'proof' of effectiveness, but if repeated across forum theatre interventions does provide support for, once again, the importance of the play in providing characters that participants could identify with in some way.

But how important and of what value is evaluation in the context of organisational theatre – or rather, could a different methodology be adopted which could address issues relating to the value of the event (after all, theatre-goers also expect to get some value from attending the theatre) without working

through, for example, Kirkpatrick's (1960) four-stage model. The next section offers an alternative approach, exploring participants' perceptions of value, through the lens of '... believability, empathy, clarity of story-line, relevance to their own lives and concerns, enjoyment of the vitality of the performance ...' (Jackson p.207).

## **Reflection and (Re-) Construction**

### **Distinctiveness and Value**

This section firstly explores the extent to which participants view of the distinctiveness of forum theatre was in alignment with those of the practitioners and commissioners, before exploring the impact in terms relevance, believability the extent of their participation and the extent to which they participated in any post-event discussions (see appendix 1).

In terms of distinctiveness, it was the visible skills of the actors which were repeatedly commented on; As one project manager noted:

*... I do think just people find actors aren't people they interact with terribly often. And I think they have never considered their skill level to the extent that you would with, say, a violinist. I think if someone plays the violin for you, it's obvious the skill and expertise in it. But I think if you see an actor on television, you don't see the skill and expertise behind that [unlike] if an actor one is working in front of you. (Dan, Project Manager)*

and this view was supported by participants:

*... I came out appreciating the art of acting much more; I thought [the actors] were brilliant, throwing themselves into each scenario and really doing it. I mean, this has nothing to do with the issues as such, but ... the discipline and the art of acting, to stand up and become someone else – I thought that was really good. (Group Participant)*

Thus, while there were concerns about the actors as facilitators, as discussed in chapter seven, their 'visible' skills of the actors are integral and made a significant contribution to the overall enjoyment of the event. But, given the emphasis on the importance of those actors representing characters and situations that the audiences could believe in, to what extent were the productions, scenarios or plays seen as representing the participants' own reality? It was noticeable that there were mixed responses to consideration of how 'real' the plays and scenarios were. One participant commented that:

*It didn't matter to me that wasn't realistic, I mean, I don't think theatre is. So I think it was a stimulating and interesting vehicle ... in one sense ... if you see something that's portrayed that's very realistic, you realise how banal life really is ... (Group Participant)*



This comment shows an understanding that the role of theatre is not so much to present life as it is really is, but to offer a metaphor of particular issues that the playwright, director and/ or actors wish the audience to consider. But perhaps more importantly, both the individual and group interviewees were able to remember remarkably accurate and detailed information from the event, in terms of the characters, the situations and the emotions it generated, after a considerable period of time, the interviews with participants being carried out up to two or three months after they had attended the event and in some cases even longer.

*M(i): But how long ago is it since you went on the event?*

*M(ii): When it started, I went on the first one. A year?*

*M(i): A year. So, ... if you actually think about retention and so forth and you actually start thinking about learning, you've carried that, and that's something that you've played around with ... but also how could you evaluate that you were going to carry that part of that event for a year? You could not have written that down on a piece of paper and said, 'I am going to think for the next year about that.' But you have. And I mean, you know, I'm a training manager and I wish lots of my delegates would carry thoughts like that for a year*  
*(Group Participants)*

The memorability of the events can, at least partially be attributed to engagement and identification with the situations and characters in the plays.

*What I thought it was about, it was... you know, I could kind of nitpick about I didn't like this bit or I didn't like that, the way in which it was managed...What made me smile, makes me smile now, is, though, that I genuinely cared about what my actor was going to say. So I was just intrigued by the fact that I had an emotional response ... (Group Participant)*

This was consistent across all the participants; while the extract above was in relation to the one-day event, with the full-length drama and forum workshop, the shorter events produced a similar reaction.

*... I stopped thinking about [what I was supposed to learn] as it was very engrossing ... it was very vivid and if I tried I could remember all of the scenarios in some detail and they were all very believable, very credible. (Robert, Participant)*

While it should be noted that the participant interviews were self-selecting, which would suggest that only those who had a recollection of the event attended the sessions, nevertheless this extract provides support for the proposition that there is a need the dramatic presentation to be firstly, relevant and credible and, secondly, for the narrative to be strong enough to enable engagement and identification

with both the story and the issues raised in order to have an impact on participants. The next section explores the impact of forum theatre events from the participant perspective, and considers the extent to which they were actively engaged in the process.

### **Active Participation**

The events observed comprised of audiences from twenty to one hundred; similar to Meisiek and Barry's (2007) observations, in the larger groups only about a third of the audience were seen to be actively participating, here defined as contributing to the discussions. In the smaller groups (less than 30), or where the large groups were broken down into smaller groups (approximately 10-15 members) to direct the actors, the percentage was considerably higher. However, what is important is not so much whether individuals actually contributed, but the extent to which individuals felt they were able to participate. The following extract was echoed in one form or other by other participants:

*I can't think of a better way of allowing participation without putting us on the spot, get everyone to participate without feeling exposed. And although there were particularly confident and articulate people there, somehow lots of people made contributions, and there wasn't any necessity to make a speech if you made a contribution or to get up and feel very exposed about it so from my impression was that probably 50% of the people there did make a contribution. I found I had quite a strong feeling, I can't remember what I said but I felt quite strongly – it produced, the act of saying whatever I said made me feel there was a bit of passion about it. (Robert, Participant)*

This comment resonates with the earlier discussion about the features of forum theatre and thus, there is recognition of a number of key elements, including the level of participant engagement, resulting in wanting to actively participate in discussions, and that the belief that it was psychologically safe to do so. However, while the session that this participant attended was an organisational-wide intervention, it was noted that there were only approximately twenty people who attended this particular session. Where there were higher participant numbers, one of the difficulties about encouraging open-ended participation, was highlighted. As noted in chapter 7 (p.129), in such sessions, there was a tendency for those who had the strongest views, could see a quick solution and/or were the most confident in speaking up tended to take over the proceedings, resulting in other participants losing interest.

Thus the open forum approach was also constructed as one in which there was a lack of direction, which presents another challenge for facilitators, but without which, as one participant suggested, 'you only learn or discuss what others want to discuss' (Group Participant). As evidenced in the previous chapter, there is an ongoing paradox for the facilitators between enabling open debate and directing the sessions towards a defined outcome which meets the needs of both the participants and the commissioners. However, as previously discussed, while the role of the practitioners is to design and

implement a session that encourages participation of the sort described above, there is also a need for the event to stimulate reflection to support both second-order observation, and, subsequently, double-loop learning (Argyris and Schon 1991). To some extent, there was evidence that it was not the forum workshops that stimulated the most reflection, but the dramatic representations. A number of participants found the inter-active workshops frustrating rather than stimulating, not only because of individual participants taking over the sessions, but because of the structure of the workshops themselves.

*M(i): I mean they had a thing where you had a, you had to direct one actor and you had to tell him what to say and then the other groups were allowed to say, 'Stop!' whenever they spoke. So it was just a succession of people saying, 'Stop!' and nobody really ... getting anywhere. I mean there was a lot of discussion around the groups and that was, that was kind of interesting. But the actual exercise of having them act it out was kind of..*

*F(i): ...I suppose that it was about getting a clarity about different perspectives and getting a bit more of a background so you can understand why people behave the way that they did, but I think that, I think, for me, that certainly, definitely got lost.*

Nevertheless, these participants went on to discuss the actual characters and what they represented in terms of the issues, with some animation and energy, again supporting the view that it not necessarily the levels of participation that stimulate action, but the reflection on the dramatic representations that have the most impact – it could therefore be suggested that second-order observation (Clark 2008; Meisiek 2002; Schreyögg 2001) is more useful when the audience are spectators or observers, rather than participants.

This comment leads into the next section which explores the extent to which the forum theatre events, whether the staged representations or the forum workshops, stimulated reflection and how participants interpreted and made sense of their observations.

### **Reflection and Sense-making**

There were a considerable evidence of reflection and sense-making from participants which tended to arise from the discussions themselves, rather than in response to specific questions. Comments such as the following were not atypical:

*... she (the administrator) said one of the problems she felt was that there could be some repercussions for her. And this was quite an insight for me, because the difficulty with all of this is what is unsaid, the blatant stuff is relatively easy to handle in a sense, it's the unsaid stuff that difficult to handle so if someone has an implicit issue. And I found that quite an insight and having been a bit of white male manager in the past (Nigel, Participant).*

What also emerged from the discussions with participants was that the overall impact was not immediate; rather in the process of exploring the perspectives of the day, thoughts about the issues raised started to be articulated, as shown by the following two extracts.

*... it was about management solutions ... it's about staff, whether the lowest grade, or highest grade, actually to respect human rights, to allow people to do the job they're employed to do. And that the first time I've been able to succinctly say that. (Alan, Participant)*

*I'm quite interested in what I suppose I label as moral courage as an aspect of management and I think that having backbone, or just the will to uphold the institution is quite key. I also think that managers can get into good habits so if you're willing to act on the small things and challenge behaviour, then you'll find it easier when you really have some big issues ... because small issues do come up and have I been content to let things go, or not pursued an area that I think could have been an issue or a problem? So yes, I think it did make me work through that again (Paul, Commissioner)*

These comments demonstrate the way that articulating reflection can lead to sense-making activities on the part of the individuals, and it is unlikely that the event per se will automatically lead to these types of outcomes but rather the process of exploring those perspectives with others.

However, it was also interesting that participants engaged in what could be termed 'otherness'. Thus participants appeared to be putting forward the view that while they as individuals were aware of the issues, others perhaps were less well informed. In the context of second-order observation this is interesting, as what appeared to be happening is that rather than 'observing observations' individuals are engaged in observing others' observations – rather than acknowledging that the behaviours depicted were recognisable in themselves. There was some tendency to reject the depictions as being themselves, but were willing to comment that others did behave in this way.

*... someone who turned round and asserted, that one of the areas of discrimination that was being exhibited by one person towards another particular group was perfectly correct For that to actually be said in open theatre ... reinforced the need for that event ... for at least two of the people sitting there, if not more people (Group Participant)*

One participant commented in relation to a question on her level of participation – '*I shut up after a while because I realised that in terms of the communication aspects which came up I simply have skills that a lot of people in the room don't have* (Penny, Participant). This response could be attributed to the nature of the interview sample – the individuals who accepted my invitation to discuss their experiences are likely to be more engaged with the process overall, including the issues, and may therefore believe that they have more knowledge and awareness of the issues than the 'average' participant.

However, one commissioner found that in spite of researching issues in the organisation that might have validity when reproducing them on stage, participants rejected this version of events, as the following extract shows:

*From [the participants] point of view, that wasn't what was happening in the organisation ... we had some staff focus groups, prior to the event, who were giving examples of behaviour. But nevertheless, 'No, no, no, that wouldn't happen'. I didn't know whether it was because it was them or whether people just didn't want to think that that happened. (Jane, Commissioner)*

This resonates with the concerns expressed that employees may reject what they perceive to management's view of organisational life (Coopey 1997), consequently alienating themselves from rather than identifying with the organisational issues.

While participants were not directly asked if they thought that the events had an impact at the organisational, rather than individual level, as this was likely to produce hypothetical responses, a number of participants, of their own accord suggested that there was a symbolic value in terms of how the event itself reflected on the organisation:

*I was speaking to a friend who works for another organisation about the day, and they were totally amazed that the council would put on something like this. He thought it was fantastic and all they had from their training for their council was just something on the screen, you know, you got a few buttons. (Group participant)*

However, this did not necessarily mean that the participants thought the events had no organisational impact beyond the symbolic, and it is interesting that while a number of them understood the search by their managers for specific outcomes, there was a view that it was not always possible to measure specific effects; even if nothing appeared to have noticeably changed, this did not mean that the events were not worthwhile.

*[the organisation] is looking for some sort of outcome, something quantitative, what's changed, and I think it's very difficult to find that. I think that all concerned have just got to take that leap .... you've just got to say, "Look, we're feeling it's got some sort of benefit". (Group Participant)*

This comment resonates with the discussion in chapter two on the function (and value) of theatre. Theatre-goers do not necessarily attend a theatre performance to be educated but they may go and see a play by David Hare, for instance, because they believe it might inform them about some societal issue in an entertaining way; thus an audience might conclude from seeing *'The Permanent Way'* (a dramatic representation about the privatisation of British Rail) that privatising the rail network was an error of

judgement or alternatively, reflect on the opposing viewpoints presented in the play without coming to a specific conclusion. Both these outcomes are equally valid and worthy of discussion, even if there is no final consensus; the value comes from the act of participating in a theatre event as much as from the actual outcome. Thus as one participant commented:

*Well, to be fair, we talk about it now in the way you'd talk about a play you'd been to see at the theatre. I can't say we talk about the issues, but the play links with it – the humour and the pathos and that sort of thing. If we'd have gone to a session and been sat round a table with somebody talking to us about diversity, we'd have forgotten about it, let alone be talking about it. (Group Participant)*

The final section of the analysis explores how the extent to which forum theatre events are supported by other organisational initiatives. This section also considers more specifically how the commissioners saw the events in retrospect.

## **Follow-up and Follow-Through**

### **An Act of Faith**

The title of this section reflects Kamoche's (2000) comment, in relation to management development initiatives, that the difficulty in establishing a link between such initiatives and organisational performance, 'has led to some to accept the value of management training and development as an act of faith' (p.748), cited previously in chapter six. The same comment could apply to the evaluation of organisational-wide forum theatre events. While commissioners did not always undertake formal evaluation, nevertheless there seemed to be a view that the activity was more than worthwhile, even if it was difficult for commissioners to articulate why or to identify specific changes.

The lack of specific evaluation activities, discussed above, was most noticeable in discussion with commissioners who had been involved in organisation-wide events; where forum theatre was used with smaller groups, normally as a part of a management development programme, there was a stronger basis for claims of effectiveness, as the learning outcomes tended to be more specifically stated, and feedback more easily obtained by managers. However, this leads back to the issue of forum theatre being used for instrumental purposes without perhaps addressing wider issues, although one event around appraising staff did raise the issue of equity and fairness in relation to managing staff. The larger the event the less opportunity there was to provide specific examples of change, so there was an air of conjecture about the discussions. Is this due to having invested a considerable amount of money into such events there is a need to rationalise the commission or is there a genuine belief that the intervention produced the desired results, even if these were not necessarily articulated?

Exploring those events which were aimed at small management groups, one commissioner stated categorically that she did not undertake any formal evaluations, but nevertheless believed that she

could see behaviour changes over the course of the programme. In this example, follow-up work was undertaken with the company and the managers, and she stated that she was able to observe changes in behaviour and organisational relationships:

*... what is now clearly happening is they are paying attention to their relationships much more such that people are asking to go out and spend time with people overseas, in order to build relationships. (Linda Commissioner)*

Some of the commissioners thus identified different measures, beyond assessing the extent to which learning outcomes were met, such as enthusiasm and buy-in from the participants, the ways in which the practitioners implemented and managed the process, and the extent to which, particularly in longer-term events, individuals started attending on the basis of word-of-mouth.

*[at one site] the number of people booked in for the first session was well below capacity but then more people turned up ... and were absolutely raving about it and went back and got all their colleagues, and there was this rush because word had spread and it really did engage people in a level of debate was different from what had gone on in other areas. (Jane, Commissioner)*

Overall, the response from the commissioners to questions about evaluation could best be described as both vague and, on occasions, lacklustre and commissioners were unsure about the impact in relation to individual or organisational change, with some tendency to sidestep the question as to whether objectives or even expectations were met – ‘*More or less – I think there are a lot of factors outside the performance and content that impact on whether people attend and whether or not they enjoy the experience*’ (Julie, Commissioner), although there were observations that some changes had occurred, with, perhaps, the forum theatre event acting as a trigger.

*I suppose in the last couple of years, not just down to the forum theatre work, but through a lot of other stuff ... is that [the issue] has been talked more about and it's more openly discussed. (Jane, Commissioner)*

Such responses mirror Meisiek and Barry’s (2007) findings that ‘in general top managers were satisfied with the organizational theatre but were unable to say whether their careful planning and implementation had paid off’ (p.1816), though they did believe that the events had ‘highlighted problematic issues’ (ibid.)

## **Embedding Forum Theatre**

Follow-up was an ongoing theme from the commissioners' interviews, although this was constructed in a number of ways. Thus, in the case of larger scale organisational events there appeared to be a recognition that a half or even a whole day spent considering and debating a particular organisational issue was not necessarily going to result in whole-scale individual or organisational change. The commissioners did perceive that there was a need for ongoing reinforcement, and acknowledged that a one-day event on its own was not enough to shift behaviours.

*... I was very outcome driven – I don't believe you can make change happen in one four hour workshop, it needs to be reinforced and reinforced. (Katherine, Commissioner)*

Participants too believed that there was a need for follow-up; as one participant commented – '*What's missing as a learning experience, is some sort of connection with beyond just saying "What is your personal 'to do' list?"*' (Nigel, Participant). This was particularly reinforced in the group interviews where the workshops began to be seen by the interviewees as opportunities to discuss and review their learning and to reconstruct with others their understanding and perceptions of both the process and the issues raised. One such participant, a training manager, had enjoyed the forum theatre day but was sceptical before attending the interview session that any learning had taken place. Towards the end of the discussion he commented:

*I think before this discussion I was saying "It was a nice thing to do, I enjoyed it, but, what's the learning?" Yet actually the discussion here today has convinced me of the power of the event. (Group Participant)*

The term 'follow-up' implies some activity undertaken either by the commissioners or participants to support the learning from the event and which may be integrated into formal evaluations or undertaken after the event. Follow-up actions initiated by the participants will be considered later in this chapter – for organisational-wide events those initiated by commissioners or providers can be categorised as either a session at the end of the day where participants were asked to articulate their learning, and provide examples of action they intended to take, or some activity later on, whereby individuals could reflect on the event and spend time considering the issues that were raised.

It was noticeable that in small-scale interventions aimed at senior managers focusing, for example, on communication or managing performance, there was evidence of much more specific follow up, often as part of the forum event.

*... and some of the things we got them doing on the workshop was literally practising their punch lines, and that was incredibly powerful actors working with individuals, practising*



*their punch line, hearing it out loud and getting the right tonality and tenacity behind what they were saying and often. (Katherine, Commissioner)*

In larger scale events, follow-up was more limited – one of the observed one-day events included a 20-minute session in which participants were asked to review the day in groups, consider whether or not the day met their expectations, and write down and share two or three actions which they would take forward. Asking participants in learning events to review their learning at the end of an event is a well-established method of enabling the learners to embed their learning, as well as offering a transition back to their workplace. From the project managers' perspective, the wrap-up session was seen as a worthwhile activity, summarising the main learning points and enabling participants to reflect on the day and consider what they might take forward:

*And then in the final session, the plenary session at the end of the day, it's group discussions, the actors, the bells and the whistles are all gone, and it's now you, as a group, must come up with these answers. (Dan Project Manager)*

This approach, however, indicates a hopeful expectation that participants will come up quickly with action plans and 'answers', rather than supporting a more reflective and less activist approach and participants were sceptical about the value of this session. This final activity, as described above, was seen as a rude awakening from what was previously viewed as an interesting and often energising way of tackling difficult issues. Apart from the issue that the session was felt to be rushed and participants were tired, it was also thought to be inappropriate, given the nature of the preceding activities. The following extract is typical of a number of similar comments:

*There was a complete mismatch between that exercise and everything else that's gone on, ... so all of a sudden we move from the experiential, as in 'What's going on for you?' into, 'This is what you're supposed to do. You need to write down some things that you're going to do'. This isn't ... 'I can now use Excel'. It was a completely different set. (Group Participant)*

Furthermore, this activity appeared not to be applied very consistently – several participants could not remember this session, and when they did recall something, it was not seen as being memorable as indicated in the following extract from a group interview:

*I: At the end of the day, did you have a discussion about taking it back to the work place?*

*F(i): No.*

*M(i): I think we did ...*

*F(ii): Yeah. I think there was definitely something about... thinking through the actual impact of actually what those prejudices have in terms of people's lives and ... (tails off)*

*M(i): I do remember that now, but the reason I didn't remember is because it was so ... badly structured.*

*F (iii): It was literally a couple of minutes at the end. (Group Participants)*

Such wrap-up sessions may be driven by the need for project managers to demonstrate to the commissioners that they pay attention to the outcomes as well as the actual process but in reality are seen by the participants as being an adjunct, rather than integral, to the day and inappropriate to the day as a whole. Gibb (2004) argues that 'no single invention can transform in and of itself' (p.749) but questions trying to achieving closure at the end of the session. It is suggested that this 'wrapping-up' could have an adverse impact, in that it may lead participants to believe that the session was complete and no more was required of them. To some extent this may have been the case in relation to ongoing discussions after the event, as is discussed in the final section of this chapter.

### **Social Sharing of Experience**

There's a sense of occasion in any theatre performance and of participation in a communal act; you go to the theatre and individual and you emerge an audience (Eyre and Wright 2000 p.11)

It was noted in chapter four of the literature review that forum theatre aims to support a dialogical approach to learning, not just during the interventions, but afterwards. One result of theatre-going is that if the event has entertained, provoked or engaged that audience, they will want to share that experience (Meisiek 2003). As Taylor (2008) notes 'We enjoy seeing the theatrical performance as entertainment. This enjoyment means that we remember it and may want to share that experience with others' (p.400) and practitioners saw this sharing as an important part of the process; as one project manager commented, '*We are after the water-cooler moment, we are after the training being discussed two weeks after the event*' (Dan, Project Manager).

One actor/facilitator commented that he attributed his enjoyment of organisational theatre work to the belief that such events would trigger further, on-going, discussion, which, in turn, would lead to some (unspecified) change – '*And I love people to actually go away and think about that, express it, talk to their family, talk to their friends and try and create a change*' (Peter, Actor/Facilitator). However, while, as discussed earlier in this chapter, the plays and workshops generated discussion and reflection during the event, there was less evidence of the events, whether the individual dramas or the event as a whole, triggering discussion back in the workplace, even when individuals came with colleagues from the same department or knew of colleagues who had attended. Given that the majority of participants were at least entertained by some, if not all, of the day, and there were a significant number of

comments which also demonstrated emotional engagement, it would have been expected that there would be some ongoing discussion and sharing of the experience. However, where such discussions did take place, they tended to be brief, and focus on the method or process, for example, the skill of the actors, their level of participation and whether or not they enjoyed the sessions. Little discussion about the issues which emerged or resonated with them, nor how the learning might be taken forward, was reported.

This finding contrasts with the participants in Meiseik and Barry's (2007) findings, where 'the level of talking about the organizational theatre was high over the five periods (p.1817). There may be a number of reasons for this – the issues, perceived as being important by the managers, did not move them sufficiently to discuss afterwards; the lack of space (actual or metaphorical) outside the event to enable time to reflect with others. However, Meiseik and Barry also found that 'interpretations shifted continuously with every performance' p.1821) and that when a series of performances occur over time, the original theatre construction becomes disengaged from the issues that created it' (ibid). This suggests not so much that the theatre construction itself changes (although, as discussed previously, there was evidence of this occurring), rather than what the organisation is paying attention to moves on. Thus, imperceptibly, if these shifts occurred in the organisations in this research, the impetus, and even opportunities, for ongoing discussion are likely to correspondingly diminish.

As noted previously the group interviews in particular were used as an opportunity to explore with others their experience of the events and to reconstruct their view in the light of these discussions. This was viewed as a worthwhile activity in its own right, not just for purposes of feedback but to make sense of and reflect on the sessions.

*... I mean, I think actually the kind of discussion we're having here, it would be quite fun to do that, not as a feedback but as an exercise for people to having had, maybe not such a long time after it happened, to do something like this, so people could say, what they thought and reflect as we have. But then maybe also as part of it say, 'And are there, are there things we can identify that we can be doing?' [and] if people have done things, to share them and other people can think, 'Oh, that's a good idea, maybe I'll start doing that.' (Group Participant)*

This was not an untypical comment in the group interviews, and there were similar instances in the individual interviews of participants wanting to think through and share their thoughts as part of their discussion which appears to contradict the previous comments about the lack of on-going discussions. This view resonates with Isaacs' (1993) comment that dialogue is 'a means for collective reflection' (p.24), but to develop effective, on-going dialogues, of the type envisioned by the practitioners, there is a need for those conversations to be initiated, and, to some extent, managed. Thus, 'if people can be brought into a setting where they, at their choice, can become conscious of the very process by which they form tacit assumptions and solidify beliefs, and be rewarded by each other for doing so, then they can develop a common strength and capability for working and creating things together' (ibid. p.25).

This view is supported by the process of the interviews, particularly with the participants, who, far from appearing to want to get the discussions over and return to their work, were actively engaged in the process of reconstructing their experiences of the forum theatre events, and were interested in making sense of the experiences they had shared.

## **Conclusion**

In the commissioning of a forum theatre event it is assumed that one outcome will be some form of learning; however, the data suggests that a different form of learning arises from what might have been originally expected. As Taylor and Ladkin (2009) note, individual audience members watching the same production of Hamlet are likely to have divergent perspectives on what they understand the play is about as a whole - 'for one that truth is about a self-questioning, existential crisis and for the other it is about the problematic nature of taking revenge' (p.59). Mangham's (2000) account of his attempts to 'find' Shakespeare's Henry (V) produces similar difficulties. His perceptions of different productions (both in film and on stage) based on his readings of the text may (and indeed do) differ from those of other scholars and theatre critics. Thus, 'in practice a particular performance signals to the audience how it must be interpreted and so 'creates' the audience as interpreter' (ibid p.296); however, this is unlikely to be one specific interpretation and this is reflected in these findings.

From the participants' perspective, on the whole reactions to the events were positive in terms of enjoyment, engagement and levels of participation. Participants did not appear to feel 'disenfranchised' by the discussions taking place from the 'safety of their seats', supporting the proposition that, handled appropriately, it is possible for active participation to occur without them leaving their seats. The majority of participants felt that they participated in some way, either by commentating and directing the actors during the improvised session or actively reflecting on the discussions. However, while a number of participants enjoyed the forum workshops, it was the dramatic representations which appeared to trigger stronger responses, both through being able to remember characters up to three or four months after the event itself, and using these representations as a reference point for relating back to their organisations. In addition, the enjoyment was enhanced by the skills of the actors in portraying the organisation, providing congruence between what the participants felt happened in reality, and what they were observing on stage. In Goffman's terms 'behaviour is to be treated as a process of people relating to each other as actors; that meaning is not a characteristic of the world but is the result of a process – an evolving social process – with others and consequently it is fragile and problematic; and the notion that the self is not a given but is derived and sustained through interaction' (Clark and Mangham 2004b p.40). This is the essence of using theatre within organisations – that individuals' behaviour is shaped by interactions and social processes and organisational theatre provides an opportunity for such interactions to be firstly observed and secondly re-enacted.

Nevertheless, it should also be noted that while there was evidence of identification and recognition, there was also evidence of ‘distancing’, with participants suggesting that the on-stage behaviours tended to be exhibited by colleagues rather than themselves. This behaviour resonates with Gibb’s (2004) comment that ‘the audience can detach themselves from self-conscious and censorious judgements about these “bad bits” ... and watch “those characters over there”...’ (p.747). If this is replicated across the organisation these events are clearly not going to result in immediate changes in behaviour. However, there is a resonance with Billington’s reference to the ‘converted cognoscenti’ (cited in Coveney 2004), that is, those individuals attending such events and be willing to take part in follow-up discussions are more likely to be interested in both the subject area and the process. As Taylor (2008) notes ‘it is important to know whether you are preaching to the choir or trying to convert the masses’ (p.404).

When considering the evaluation of forum theatre interventions, it was noticeable that it was the project managers who placed more emphasis on taking a functionalist approach to evaluation, and appeared to be more preoccupied than the commissioners on wanting to produce specific outcomes, particularly in relation to the return on investment (ROI). Commissioners, while citing some examples of different approaches to evaluation, appeared to be more interested in longer-term change, but were unclear how this might be achieved. Participants took a similar view, that undertaking short-term or functionalist evaluations was not going to be particularly meaningful activity. The differing perspectives on approaches to evaluation may be partially attributed to, at least, that, firstly, practitioners have an ongoing, but possibly unfounded anxiety that they need to demonstrate immediate results, and, secondly, organisations who commission such activities may be atypical in terms of wanting to explore alternative approaches to learning and development which, by their very nature, are problematic to evaluate at least on short-term basis. In other words, commissioners, particularly of organisational-wide events may be well aware that investment in this forum theatre, or other theatre-based interventions will not result in immediate change.

However, if this is a correct interpretation, it is surprising then that little effort is put into providing further opportunities to embed the learning. It was noticeable that where the emphasis was more on the individual skills rather than organisational issues, follow-up activities were more likely to be built into the process. The interpretation of this can be that smaller scale-events aimed at management level tend to have clearer objectives which, firstly can be evaluated, and, secondly are perceived by organisations as ones in which it is worth investing resources. However, when the events were aimed at the organisational level, little attention was paid to evaluation or follow-up activities; when events were ended with a ‘wrap-up session’, this was generally seen as being somewhat perfunctory and did not, from the participant perspective, fit the form or structure of the event.

The issue of follow-up in relation to forum theatre events has not received a great deal of scrutiny in the literature but emerged as an important theme in this chapter. As Schreyögg (2001) notes, ‘organisational theatre can make things move, but it is not a substitute for change management ... that

would be too easy a perspective, watch a piece of organisational theatre and the desired change is realised ... it is just a single intervention. It has no magical transformational power' (p.13).

Thus there is a tension between the espoused aims of organisational theatre and the theatre form itself. While the aims of such events focus on the management intentions to bring about some form of specific learning and change, either at an individual or organisational level, 'aesthetic forms create individualized meaning and learning that is different for each person' (Elm and Taylor 2010 p.133). Attempting to elicit specific and immediate learning from theatre-based interventions are therefore unlikely to result in finding a specific outcome.

However, it was noted that project managers in particular, cited examples of evaluation / follow-up activities which involved collecting qualitative data through the use of individual and group discussions with all the stakeholders. This approach resonates with the types of evaluation from the 'grey literature', cited in the introduction to this chapter. Thus, for example, Greatbatch et al.'s (2005) evaluation of arts-based interventions for the Wellcome Foundation, took a multi-method approach, surveying and interviewing project managers and participants both immediately after the event, and one or two months on, supported by observation and other visual data. A recent development is Preskill and Torres' (1999) more holistic approach process of evaluative inquiry, which incorporates dialogue, reflection and inquiry, prior to, during and after the event. This approach has the potential to be built in to the process of forum theatre, so that the evaluative process becomes integral, not an adjunct, to the event.

Thus this research considered the impact and effect of forum theatre events from the perspective that 'each participant may have ... views as to the real motives for the programme and will consciously or otherwise be evaluating against these' (Mabey and Finch-Lees 2008 p.233), reviewing the effects in relation to the value placed on the intervention, regardless of whether or not the espoused aims are met. Through taking a more constructivist view of evaluation, the findings show that forum theatre events have the potential to add value to organisations, although perhaps not in the way that the commissioners originally intended. There is a resonance with Samuel Beckett's comment that 'the form, structure and mood of an artistic statement cannot be separated from its meaning, its conceptual content; simply because the work of art as a whole, is its meaning, what is said in it is indissolubly linked with the manner in which it is said...' (cited in Esslin 1970 p.44). Thus it is suggested that when attempts are made to evaluate forum theatre interventions, attention to the form and structure needs to be considered as well as the content and outcomes.

## CHAPTER 9

### TOWARDS AN UNDERSTANDING OF FORUM THEATRE

#### Introduction

In recent years there has been a significant increase in the use of theatre-based interventions in organisations, yet, as Clark (2007) notes, ‘scholarly activity in the area has been very limited’ (p.405). This research aimed to rectify this omission, through an exploration into one of the more problematic areas of organisational theatre, namely forum theatre. Empirical research on forum theatre is limited and has focused on individual cases (see Clark and Mangham 2004a; Gibb 2004; Meisiek and Barry 2007); this research expands these studies in a number of specific ways. Firstly, it was noticeable the extent to which the organisational theatre literature is located in the organisational rather than performance studies field; this research draws on both the applied and organisational theatre literature to provide a greater understanding of the form and structure of this method. Secondly, unlike previous studies, it provides a close examination of the features of forum theatre and how these features interact in relation to the development and implementation of forum theatre initiatives. Finally, of the three previous studies cited above, two are based primarily on observation, with some reference to the practitioners and participants; this research draws extensively on data from all the stakeholders, commissioners, the theatre consultancies and participants. Thus this thesis contributes significantly to organisational theatre studies, through providing a thorough review of how and why such interventions are designed, implemented and evaluated. It provides specific examples of forum theatre as a dynamic and negotiated process between commissioners, practitioners and participants. While previous research has drawn on stakeholders voices to some extent, this study has given a voice to all those involved in the process, enabling a comparison of the various perspectives, which, in turn, provides a deeper understanding of forum theatre processes.

The main findings are summarised as follows. Firstly, while forum theatre has the potential to provide a more democratic approach to learning, development and change in organisations (Coopey 1997, 2002; Clark and Butcher 2004), in reality assumptions made by commissioners and practitioners have led to a more bounded and unitarist approach than initially indicated by the organisational theatre literature. However, while there may be an initial presumption that it is the commissioners who are promoting an instrumental approach, the findings show that the practitioners also hold a number of assumptions that lead to promoting theatre-based interventions and forum theatre in a more instrumental manner than may, in reality, be required. Related to this finding, in the implementation of forum theatre the research highlights the ambiguity of the role of the actor/facilitator, a role which, while cited as being key to forum theatre interventions in the applied theatre literature (Babbage 2004; Jackson 1992; Jackson 2007), has been overlooked in previous organisational theatre studies. Thirdly, while a number of applied and organisational theatre studies commentators have cited the importance of follow-up initiatives to support organisational and forum theatre interventions (Schreyögg 2001;

Schreyögg and Hopfl 2004), the findings show that lack of evaluation and follow-up of such interventions result in less likelihood of forum theatre initiatives being embedded within organisations.

These findings will be presented in more detail in the next section through a consideration of the research questions in relation to the construction, implementation and impact of forum theatre, which includes a review of the extent to which the perspectives of the practitioners, commissioners and participants are in alignment. This is followed by a discussion on the contribution the findings make to understanding the processes of forum theatre. The implications for practice and suggestions for further research will then be considered

## **Discussion of Research Questions**

The aim of the research was to explore the extent to which the perspectives of practitioners, commissioners and participants were in alignment, in relation to the development, implementation and evaluation of forum theatre initiatives. The main findings from each of the research questions will be discussed in turn.

### **Constructing Forum Theatre**

The findings show that forum theatre is structured in a number of different ways by practitioners and commissioners. What emerged from the findings was the extent to which the process of putting together a forum theatre event is shaped by a number of pre-conceived assumptions and expectations on the part of all those involved which are not always explicitly clarified. Thus, while forum theatre tended to be used synonymously with interactive theatre, how different approaches are tailored to support different learning and development objectives has not been fully explored. Thus, while the literature (see Clark and Mangham 2004a; Meisiek and Barry 2007; Schreyögg 2001; Schreyögg and Hopfl 2004) presents forum theatre as being an organisational-wide intervention, the findings show that it is also used as a method of individual skills development. The ambiguity partly arises from the roles, experience and background of commissioners and practitioners; commissioners tended to have an human resource or learning and development remit, and while some had an interest in the theatre, were not always aware of the underpinning processes of forum theatre, the ‘nature of theatre’ itself. ‘Applied theatre is applied theatre because it uses the art form of theatre. In order to experiment with that form there needs to be a prior understanding of it. So at both ends it is a prerequisite. In applied theatre the producers must consider what dramatic construction will best fulfil their purposes’ (Ackroyd 2000). Taking the producers as being not only the theatre consultancies, but also the commissioning organisations, the data from this research shows that commissioners do not have knowledge and understanding of the ‘theatrical form’; thus it is difficult for commissioners, as co-producers in the enterprise, to know what form would suit their purpose most effectively.



From the practitioner perspective, forum theatre, as an organisational-wide intervention, draws, not always explicitly, on applied theatre processes to inform the approach, which in turn has increasingly drawn on the work of Augusto Boal. However, a comparison of espoused theory and theory-in-use, in relation to forum theatre, shows the emergence of competing discourses. The applied theatre literature promotes the use of forum theatre as a way of bringing about societal change, using theatre as a vehicle to question the status quo. However, in the organisational context, the focus is on promoting a unitarist perspective through its emphasis on problem solving, inclusivity and working together to achieve consensus. Furthermore, the dramatic representations observed and discussed are not so much about 'illustrating the essence' (Taylor and Ladkin 2009) of particular issues, but promoting a message, even if in an indirect way – rather than using theatre to offer a range of different perspectives, through both the initial script development and the implementation of the process, there is a tendency to promote the view that certain types of behaviour are acceptable while others are not. The interactive forum workshops may provide opportunities for new and different understandings to be brought to the fore but only if the nature of the facilitation supports this process. The findings relating to the facilitation and management of forum theatre events are discussed in the next section.

### **A Negotiated Process**

The ambiguity referred to earlier, works its way through to the enactment of the events. The findings show that the dramatic representations are a key feature of forum theatre. But it is not just the narrative or script that is of importance but where the control of the narrative lies (Nissley et al. 2004). Thus while Nissley et al. suggest 'the most truly powerful organisational theatre-based training interventions are not presented to audiences as a finished product or grand narrative; rather, they encourage the audience members to find themselves (role) and their voices (script) in the performance' (2004 p.18), in reality the dramas, while not presented as the finished product, provide a structure that is driven by the management, rather than employee/participant, perspective. Thus while there were examples where participants had genuine control of the script, and indeed, were able to voice opinions that challenged management views, these opportunities are relatively limited. Forum theatre practitioners would argue that the purpose of the scripts is to define the issues, and it is the forum workshops, the interactive part of such events, which provide opportunities for the employees to find their voice and enable participants to challenge the depiction of these issues through questioning the underlying assumptions. However, the findings show that, the employee voice is being regulated by the actors/facilitators, who, driven by the need to provide direction and management to the process, employ a range of tactics to channel, rather than open-up discussion, often leading to a focus on the presenting, rather than underlying issues.

While, as noted previously Boal and others advocate that the facilitator retains an entirely separate role to maintain neutrality, in reality, resource constraints mean that the actors frequently move between the two roles. Even when there was a separate facilitator who took no part in the performances or improvisations, the actors, particularly when being directed by the participants in active-audience

sessions, by default became part-actor, part-facilitator. The lack of role clarity impacts on whether the participants perceive the events as open ended-forums, or closely managed training. Clearly to some extent this will depend on whether the aim of the event is individual skills training or an organisation-wide event but if the aim is to open up discussions to encompass 'unsayable' viewpoints, and that promise is going to be fulfilled, the emphasis needs to be on developing dialogical rather than interventionist theatre (Jackson 2007) .

The data shows there are two schools of thought as to the extent to which the actors/facilitators need to have a background in business; one view, that organisational experience is a key requirement is supported by Taylor and Ladkin (2009) who recommend that facilitators need 'expertise in both artistic and organisational worlds' (p.66) arguing that artists, or in this case, actors, 'without experience of organisational realities can flounder and not make adequate connections between the intervention and participants comments' (ibid.). The other view, found in this research, is that management and business processes can be learnt and the focus should be on the skills of the actor to bring the organisational realities to life. The findings show that while an understanding of organisational life may be beneficial, there is a danger that as facilitators, actors may feel confident enough to become 'experts', thus, perhaps inadvertently, leading participants down routes set by the facilitators, not by the participants.

### **Impact of Forum Theatre**

Taylor and Ladkin (2009) note the difficulty of transferring high impact events back to the work place; while this is an issue with all one-off developmental activities, 'arts- based methods tend to be further afield than the day-to-day reality of most organizations than conventional methods' (ibid p.66) making the transfer more difficult. Transfer in this context refers to the extent to which participants drew on the event or the learning from the event to inform their day-to-day practice. Forum events could be described as high impact, in that, on the whole, there was considerable evidence of enjoyment, engagement and participation, that participants reported that the sessions were interesting and often insightful, and that the events could be recalled several months afterwards. However, while there might be an expectation that, post-event, participants would want to engage in sharing these experiences at a later time (Meisiek 2003; Taylor 2008), in organisational-wide events there was little evidence of individuals returning to their departments and discussing the issues (rather than the process) with their colleagues, or of commissioners providing further initiatives to support the initial event.

It may be that such theatrical events have a cathartic effect, in the Aristotelian sense, so that while the event produces strong emotions, they leave the audience 'drained and safely calm' (Shepherd and Wallis 2004 p.175). If this were the case, then Boal's concern that the cathartic effect may 'wear down the audience's capacity for action' (Babbage 2004) would be supported. However, the findings suggest an alternative interpretation. While, as discussed in chapter six, forum theatre was essentially

constructed and marketed as providing a pre-scripted dramatic representation supported by forum workshops, which were seen, at least by the practitioners, as the key part of such events. However, the findings show that it was the dramatic representations, which have the potential to provide ‘a ... powerful space for challenge, reflection and instruction’ (Mangham 2001 p.296), which were the most memorable and thought-provoking part of the sessions for participants.

In contrast, the forum workshops were designed to enable participants to enter into discussion and debate, interacting with colleagues and the actors/facilitators to ‘invent and try out new possibilities’ Meisiek and Barry (2007 p.1806). Both the applied and organisational theatre literature place more emphasis on participation rather than observation, but while applied theatre initiatives will normally only be required to meet the needs of the participants, the facilitators of forum workshops have multiple stakeholders. This leads to a more regulated experience for organisational participants, with an emphasis on solving a problem rather than engendering open-ended discussion, which may, or may not, lead to solutions. If, as Gibb (2004) suggests, participants perceive that the matter being discussed is resolved, and that closure has been achieved, there will be limited motivation to consider the issues further.

However, it was not only the participants who appeared disinclined to follow-up the events. While with skills-based forum theatre there were a number of examples provided of support activities to enable the transfer of learning to day-to-day work activities, with the organisational-wide events, there was little evidence of further activities to support the initiative. Thus while commissioners were hopeful that the event would have an impact on individual, if not organisational, behaviours, little attempt was made to undertake evaluations beyond the post-event feedback sheet. It was also noticeable that project managers were more pre-occupied than commissioners with providing evidence of longer-term effectiveness. This finding could be interpreted in a number of ways. It may be that commissioners believe that, having invested considerable resources in offering employees an opportunity for participatory learning, they would prefer such participation to remain contained within the event itself and not offer (further) opportunities to challenge the status quo. Alternatively, it may be that commissioners understand that such events are likely to produce subtle changes which take place over a considerable period of time, thus making evaluation, at least for organisational wide interventions, problematic and not necessarily seen to be a cost-effective activity.

The next section provides an overview of the key contributions that this research has made to understanding the nature of forum theatre, which in turn offers implications for the commissioning, development and implementation of forum theatre initiatives.

## Key Contributions

This research has contributed to a greater understanding of forum theatre processes through an in-depth exploration of the structure, form and features of forum theatre. The impact of such events is contextually dependent, that is the model of arts-, theatre- based or forum theatre interventions which is selected by commissioners (or marketed to them by the theatre consultancies) has an impact on the outcomes. The outcomes are further mediated by the levels of control imposed by the facilitators and the extent to which they are able or willing to pass control of such events over to the participants. Thus there is an initial lack of understanding of what theatre-based interventions (including forum theatre) can provide, a focus on instrumental outcomes which are in conflict with the theatre form, and a lack of meaningful follow-up, particularly in organisational-wide interventions, raising issues for the effective transfer of learning or change back into the workplace.

The typology of organisational theatre (figure 3.2 p.31) shows that it is a highly flexible form, with, as noted previously, the ability to offer a range of different approaches and activities. The research shows that there is an overlap between the *'forum theatre'*, *'theatre as a resource'*, and theatre as *'work-in-progress'* typologies. Thus one method, albeit with different forms (see p.98), appears to have a number of purposes. Thus in certain cases forum theatre may be used as a work-in-progress activity, implicitly or explicitly focusing on supporting the transfer of interpersonal or management skills. Two forum theatre events observed during this research were specifically aimed at skills transfer, but in one event, participants observed and intervened as directors, not as spect-actors. The underlying assumption appears to be that individuals' behaviours can be changed through observing and discussing, but not practicing, what could be termed 'best practice' approaches, a possibly naïve assumption. However, where, as with the second skills-based event, observation is combined with activity and on-stage participation, and supported by ongoing evaluation and reinforcement, there is a stronger likelihood of such skills becoming embedded.

However, where the forum theatre events were used as a vehicle for considering organisational rather than individual issues, these activities were often described by commissioners and project managers as training, with, the emphasis on solving particular problems through depicting how individual rather than organisational behaviours may contribute to that problem. Thus, rather than engendering an exploration of the issue from an organisational perspective, and enabling participants to explore the multiple realities that may be embedded within the organization, such interventions appear to focus more on the individual skills and behaviours required to manage that particular issue. Hardly surprising then, that some participants in forum theatre activities were unclear of the purpose of these events.

Thus this review of forum theatre activities shows that that the processes of viewing and doing are often conflated, with a lack of distinction between forum theatre interventions that are focused on individual (often management) skills, and those interventions that are designed to focus on

organisational issues. The latter type of interventions are by their nature, more ambiguous with, as noted previously, more open-ended outcomes and it is these interventions where closer attention to applied theatre models may be merited. Thus, activities embodied within projective techniques, such as forum theatre, leads to discussing 'the art object' (Taylor and Ladkin 2009 p.65) through, in this case, the theatre form, which 'provides a certain distance and detachment from emotionally charged issues' (ibid). This provides the opportunity for participants to understand different perspectives and to access the multiple meanings which exist within organisations. While it might be expected that skills transfer processes would be more management-led and unitarist in perspective, 'projective techniques', translated into forum theatre activities should, in theory, employ a more pluralistic framework, enabling those different meanings to emerge. Thus we have a contradiction in terms – participants, as noted earlier, are being asked to watch a dramatic representation and take some meaning from it, but management (and practitioners) are aiming to achieve consensus of that meaning. However, consensual approaches, which were referred to particularly by practitioners, 'generally do not have the ambition of exploring or altering underlying patterns of meaning' (Isaacs 1993 p.26).

It is proposed that positioning forum theatre within the Boalian discourse limits the scope for exploration within the organisational context. In this context the philosophy of forum theatre is, in reality, closer to Burgoyne and Jackson's (1997) 'arena thesis', which promotes a dialogical approach to learning, through the creation of events which allow exploration of ideas and the construction of new meanings and approaches, promoting the facilitation of change through dialogue and discussion. This approach resonates with Fulop and Rifkin's (1997) learning spaces; both approaches support the applied theatre model, but, unlike applied theatre practices, specifically acknowledge the organisational context. Burgoyne and Jackson acknowledge that in the organisational context, management need to provide protected spaces to support learning, and while this may appear to be an oxymoron in the context of supporting pluralist approaches to learning, such spaces need to be initiated (rather than be left to develop organically) in order to be effective (Isaacs 1993). This framework provides a more contextually specific model to support forum theatre interventions, providing a link between theatre-based and organisational practices.

Theatre is an ambiguous activity; furthermore, as Clark and Salaman (1996) note, the nature of any consultancy product is ambiguous – clients are being asked to 'buy a promise' (p. 91). Thus it is not surprising that there is ambiguity around enacting of forum theatre interventions, the purposes of such interventions and the ways in which such events are managed from the script development stage through to enactment. It is suggested that, in the case of forum theatre, theory and practice has not yet been 'joined up' in a manner sufficient to convince practitioners that more awareness of current developments in organisational and individual learning could support their quest for providing more innovational interventions, which would genuinely offer 'liberation of the spectator' (Nissley et al. 2004). An underpinning theme of this research has been the tension between control of event and the desire, mainly by the consultancies, for more open-ended and flexible events, coupled with a perception that this would be difficult to sell to clients – consultancies are promoting their 'product' on

the basis of maintaining the 'status quo' (Coopey 2002) while at the same time expressing dissatisfaction that more radical approaches would be unacceptable to their clients.

Thus in the context of theatre-based interventions, there is a need for awareness by both commissioners and practitioners that forum theatre should not be principally concerned with the transmission or acquisition of knowledge but with 'understanding who we are and what potential we have to contribute to our own and others' development' (Coopey and Burgoyne 1998 p.872). This reflects the primary function of theatre as discussed in chapter one; the increased interest in 'political' theatre (Coveney 2004), which is concerned with how theatre can enable reflection and understanding of societal issues resonates with the shift from 'aesthetic' to 'applied' theatre, which in turn, underpins forum theatre. The use of arts-based methods draws on the presentational form of knowing (Elm and Taylor 2010; Taylor and Ladkin 2009), that is knowing which 'provides the first form of expressing meaning and significance through drawing on expressive forms of imagery through movement, dance, sound, music, drawing, painting, sculpture, poetry, story, drama, and so on' (Heron and Reason 2001 p.183). The findings suggest that commissioners and even project managers may be more concerned with promoting propositional knowledge, 'those ideas and theories expressed in informative statements' (ibid). Forum theatre, given its antecedents, is likely to be at its most effective if it can be used to as method to providing a stimulus for participants to access and view their own experiences and form emotional connections to those experiences (Taylor and Ladkin 2009; Elm and Taylor 2010). While there is evidence that commissioners offer emotional engagement as a reason for using forum theatre interventions, the findings show that it is the participants who have a greater understanding, if implicitly, as to how theatre can shape their understanding of issues and more explicitly made the connections between engagement, identification and reflection.

The above discussion has implications for both the theatre consultancies and commissioners of theatre-based interventions and forum theatre, which are discussed in the next section.

## **Implications for Practice**

### **Implications for Consultancies**

It is recognized that it is challenging for theatre consultancies to specifically state what they are selling given that, in common with consultancies in general, they are unable 'to rely on a distinct, well defined and professionally endorsed body of knowledge and qualifications' (Sturdy 1997 p.347) and, are indeed promoting an ambiguous product. However, it is suggested that to some extent, theatre consultancies could ameliorate this ambiguity, by paying more attention to the processes that support and enable their work, as discussed in this research. Furthermore, while from the practitioners' interviews there is a strong belief in the 'power' of theatre which underpins their work, this appears to be underplayed in the discussions with potential clients, focussing more on the 'fit' between theatre and organisations, rather than the distinctiveness of what is being offered. This distinctiveness has been

highlighted both in the literature and this research, but remains under-exploited in how theatre consultancies promote their work, particularly in terms of whether they are offering a theatre product (the dramatic representations of organisational issues) or a theatre process. In forum theatre, as previously discussed, both the product and process are integrated into one event, which results, to some extent, in diluting the potential impact. As previously noted, arts-based processes which draw on projective techniques (such as forum theatre) can provide 'access to the multiplicity of meaning makings that exist within an organisation' (Taylor and Ladkin 2009 p.65), but this feature of forum theatre interventions appears to be underplayed by the consultancies. It is hoped that this research may offer alternative ways for theatre consultancies to promote their work.

What is clear from this research is the need to develop the role of the facilitator, which was regularly cited as being key to the success of forum theatre events by all the stakeholders. As noted previously the role of the facilitator was to remain neutral, but it would seem, from both the commissioner and participant perspective that this was not always the case and there is a danger that the actors/facilitators are falling between two roles. They are not experts in the area that they are discussing – while business experience was frequently cited as a key attribute for the actors, in reality this seemed more about the ability to 'speak management speak' rather than expertise in, for example, performance management, effective communication or diversity. However it is not difficult to see why an actor, carrying out a forum theatre assignment over a period of months, would believe that they had some expertise to offer and certainly examples could be found where the actors were perceived by either the participants or commissioners as directing the participants to a specific response.

As noted at the start of this chapter there is limited overlap between the organisational studies (including learning and development) and the applied theatre literature; this seems to be mirrored in the implementation of theatre-based interventions, with insufficient attention being paid by practitioners to the underpinning processes from both learning and performance theory. It is clearly not appropriate to advise on the type of actors that are employed to carry out organisational theatre work, and indeed, as noted previously, there is a mixed view as to whether actors need to have a business background. However, it is suggested that it is not the actors/facilitators' background which is of importance, but the underpinning models of facilitation that they hold. Thus it is proposed that, while acknowledging the resource implications for theatre consultancies, ongoing training, development and supervision be made an integral part of the actors' employment. An understanding of learning theory and processes would enable the actors to be more critically reflective in their facilitator role (Gregory and Romm 2001) and develop a greater understanding of the impact their interventions may have on participants.

Finally, the question arises as to the extent to which consultancies should promote or even integrate evaluation and/or follow-up activities into the intervention. The research has indicated that integrating evaluation into the intervention itself is not particularly effective, given the need for participants to have time to reflect on their feelings and observations from the events. While in the tender documents there was reference to post-event evaluation and the provision of additional, though often non-specific,

support for other activities, the latter was rarely raised in the discussions with the project managers. It is suggested that, given the evidence, particularly from the group discussions, of the value of follow-up activities, that theatre consultancies consider developing additional expertise in this area to advise on and offer appropriate support for on-going work to embed the initial intervention.

### **Implications for Commissioners**

It would seem from the research that commissioners are generally unclear about what theatre-based and forum theatre interventions can offer. The majority of commissioners had a background in human resource management or development and were able to discuss the differences they had perceived between forum theatre and more 'traditional' methods of learning and development, but were generally less able to articulate how they perceived theatre-based interventions could support organisational learning, and change. A recurring theme throughout this thesis has been the lack of research into theatre-based and forum theatre interventions and, by implication, the relationship between learning theory and such approaches. While it would clearly be unrealistic to expect that commissioners should have a working knowledge of the theatre, the findings show there is scope for theatre consultancies exploring with clients alternative perspectives to enable a less management-driven approach to individual and organisational learning. As Taylor (2008) notes, 'plays show rather than tell an audience what is happening ... [thus] the change agents lose control over how organisational members will make sense of events' (p.404). While, managers may be reluctant to relinquish their power base, the findings suggest that theatre-based interventions have the potential, not fully realised to date, to develop a more democratic, organisational discourse (Coopey 1998; Clark and Butcher; Raelin 2008).

In terms of evaluation and follow-up, while those events which focussed on individual skills tended to have ongoing support built into the events, possibly because they were aimed at senior managers, little or no on-going support was provided for organisation-wide initiatives. There may be due to issues related to senior or local management buy-in, rather than a lack of understanding that 'no single intervention can transform people in and of itself' (Gibb 2004 p.749). However, from the evidence of the participants, if further opportunities for discussion and sense-making are not provided, the initial enthusiasm and interest gets lost when participants return to their day-to-day role.

The question posited by Mabey and Finch-Lees (2008) 'Why is management development typically preoccupied with programmes and events rather than the developmental space between them' (p.4), is relevant here, and could equally apply to consideration of forum theatre programmes; while the one purpose of forum theatre was to develop 'spaces' for discussion and debate, which was acknowledged by a number of commissioners, little or no space was offered to participants to explore the issues further. What is clear from this research is that such interventions cannot deliver on their 'promises' when they continue to be offered on effectively a one-off basis and, for any changes from such interventions to be sustained an 'evaluative space' is needed to support and embed the interventions. While, as discussed in chapter eight, there remains a strong focus on functional approaches to



evaluation, the practice of evaluative inquiry (Preskill and Torres 1999; Yorks 2005), a more holistic method encompassing dialogue and reflection, offers scope for organisations to develop forum theatre as catalyst for organisational learning. An example can be provided from this research; as noted in chapter five (p.86) the group interviews enabled participants in forum theatre events to reflect on the intervention, and re-construct their experiences in the context of having a shared experience. However, it is also apparent from this research that such discussions are unlikely to develop spontaneously. While 'managing' pluralistic or democratic approaches to learning and development may appear to be a contradiction in terms (Burgoyne and Jackson 1997), nevertheless, if forum and organisational theatre interventions are to achieve their potential, ways need to be found to embed these approaches, ideally drawing on the appropriate methodologies.

As Sturdy (1997) notes, 'consultants do not operate in a vacuum. Rather, their interventions are set within existing frames of reference, beliefs, commitments and action patterns of their client organisations' (p.351). The issues raised in the above discussion on implications for practice are inter-related. By greater articulation on both sides (practitioners and commissioners) of these beliefs and frames of references, organisational and forum theatre interventions may be more likely to fulfill the expectations of practitioners and commissioners.

The final sections provide some reflections on this research and offer consideration for future research.

## **Reflections on the Research**

It is recognised that 'qualitative researchers 'are more likely to be aware of (and feel they have to explain) the epistemological stance they are taking, and defend their research in the context of positivist notions of reliability, generalizability and validity' (Cassell and Symon 1994 p.8). Validity, in the context of this research, is provided partially through numerous extracts from the data, presented in chapters six to eight, which provide evidence in support of the interpretation of the findings and the subsequent conclusions. While it is acknowledged that the data was not scrutinised by other researchers, during the process of the research a number of conference papers were produced, which incorporated some of the emergent findings, and provided an opportunity to discuss and review my findings with both my co-author and conference participants. In addition, I presented some of the initial data and findings to individuals who had taken part in forum theatre events, and their responses shaped the research and data analysis phases. Finally, some of the data was shared with Masters students during research methods classes and, again, their suggestions and ideas informed the analysis of my findings. Thus while the data was not subjected to the type of scrutiny available when a number of researchers are working on a project, opportunities were taken to present, share and discuss my findings with interested parties. Thus, to some extent at least, the analysis became ... 'a series of dialogues: with the data, with ideas, with informants, with colleagues, with oneself' (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996 p.191).

It is also recognised that the issue of generalisability needs to be approached with caution. It was suggested in chapter five that it can be argued that, if similar views emerged across the groups who had been involved in or had experience of forum theatre, there is the potential to be able to generalise from the individual to the collective. However, it is also acknowledged that the research took place primarily in two public sector organisations, with supporting data provided by other commissioners and theatre consultancies, and the experiences, particularly of the participants, may not be applicable in other contexts. Nevertheless, while acknowledging the different perspectives in the analysis of the findings, there was also sufficient consensus, supported by iterative references to the literature, to believe that the conclusions drawn from the findings are relevant across the field of theatre-based interventions.

## **Future Research**

As noted previously, the majority of this research took place within the public sector, but there is also a significant amount of activity in the private sector, which has received little attention. If the private sector was as willing as the public sector to open its doors, there is opportunity for further research to explore how the organisational culture could impact on the implementation of theatre-based events. This suggestion reflects Antal's comment that 'either very few organizations have been willing to submit their experiences with artistic interventions to some form of evaluation, or that very few researchers have shown an interest in doing so' (2009 p.11). Given my own experiences it is more likely that the former is more the case; this may seem strange given that theatre consultancy websites list numerous private sector organisations that have used theatre based interventions, but the key word here is scrutiny. While the practitioner literature does cite private sector organisations, almost without exception, little analysis is supplied and, as is often the case with journals such as *People Management*, such examples are provided as successful case studies rather than critical evaluations of the technique.

A second area of research would be to take the theatre consultancies as the 'unit of analysis'. There has been considerable amount of research into management consultancy work and a number of models of consultancy on offer. Research into how the theatre consultancies align themselves with other consultancy approaches, what specific models of consultancy activity do they hold, and, given the theatre, rather than management, background of organisational theatre practitioners, and the ambiguity of the actor/facilitator role, how do theatre practitioners construct, or re-construct, their identities within the organisational context? Undertaking research into the practices of the theatre-based consultancies would enable new insights into how they perceive the relationship between theatre and organisations.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This chapter argued that this research offers a significant contribution to existing studies on organisational and forum theatre, through a thorough exploration of the practices of organisational and forum theatre, providing evidence that while Boal's original model of forum theatre has been subsumed or even colonised by theatre consultancies, forum theatre, nevertheless, offers organisations a distinctive approach to learning and development, and, if such interventions can be embedded in the organisation, can offer up a way of supporting 'creative dialogue' (Larsen 2005). The extent to which organisations are ready for an 'artful shift' (Barry 2007 p.31) is, to some extent, questionable and as Barry goes on to note, whether such a shift will be 'a rounding of organisational corners or seismic shift remains to be seen: much depends whether the intriguing but far-distant concepts of the art world can find their way into organisational practice, or whether these ideas will simply prove too alien and insufficiently instrumental' (ibid.). However, while a considerable number of reservations and questions have been raised in this research, I continue to support the view of Taylor and Ladkin (2009) that theatre (and indeed other arts-based interventions) can provide opportunities to review those taken-for-granted in organisational life. It is hoped that this research will provide deeper understanding of the processes and impact of forum theatre, so that this potential can be realised.

## APPENDICES

## **Appendix 1**

### **Interview Schedules : Project Managers**

1. Tell me about how your company started/ how you started working in this area?
2. Would you give a brief outline of the types of theatre interventions you do?
3. What do you think is distinctive about the use of theatre in contrast to other forms of training/learning interventions?
4. What criteria do you use to select your acting company? How much training do they receive (in relation to facilitation skills and business training)?
5. In what circumstances do you use forum theatre and why (as opposed to other types of training)?
6. To what extent do you view your work being based on Boal's methodologies?
7. What principles in relation to using forum theatre underpin your work?
8. What do you see the objectives of using forum theatre are, compared with other activities that you undertake?
9. How do you develop your forum theatre programmes? i.e. who is involved in the process – commissioner, participants, director, playwright, actors?
10. Can you think back to what you thought was a particularly successful forum theatre event? Why was it successful? What criteria did you use?

## **Appendix 2**

### **Interview Schedules : Actors/Facilitators**

1. Could you tell me how you started in this area of work?
2. Tell me about your role in the process, both in the terms of the development of the event, and in terms of the event itself?
3. Can you give a brief outline of the types of theatre interventions you've been involved in?
4. How would you describe your use of forum theatre?
5. To what extent do you view the interventions as being based on the work of Boal?
6. What training do you get/have you had in relation to delivering the programmes?
7. What do you think is distinctive about the use of forum theatre in contrast to other forms of training/learning interventions?
8. What do you see as being the aims / objectives of forum theatre events?
9. To what extent do you see the forum theatre process as being led by the participants?
10. Describe how you work with the commissioners/providers.
11. Thinking of a specific event, what worked and why? Did you encounter any problems? Were these problems (if any) typical?
12. Can you think back to what you thought was a particularly successful forum theatre event? Why was it successful? What criteria did you use?

### Appendix 3

#### Interview Schedule : Commissioners Schedule (Direct)

1. Can you tell me you made decide to choose this method and what made you choose [the particular company]?
2. Could you describe the process of commissioning the event?
3. Did you have any experience/knowledge of theatre-based interventions or forum theatre before commissioning the programme?
4. Having made the decision to go with forum theatre, what were your expectations?
5. What were you objectives for the organisation?
6. Do you think those objectives were specifically communicated to the participants during the programme?
7. In your view were those objectives met?
8. How did you personally experience the event?
9. If you've talked about it with other members of the commissioning team, how did they experience it?
10. How did you evaluate/how are you evaluating the outcomes?
11. What do you think is distinctive about the use of theatre in contrast to other forms of training/learning intervention you have commissioned?
12. In your view was the programme a success? Why?
13. Is any follow-up planned/being carried out?

## **Appendix 4 :**

### **Interview Schedule : Commissioners (Consultants)**

1. How long have you been using forum theatre/theatre-based interventions?
2. What criteria did you use to decide if forum theatre is an appropriate method?
3. How do you describe forum theatre when discussing its use with your clients?
4. What do you think is distinctive about the use of (forum) theatre in contrast to other forms of training/learning intervention you have commissioned?
5. What do you expect theatre-based interventions/forum theatre to provide that other methods might not?
6. Could you describe a specific forum theatre event or events that went well?
7. Thinking of that event:
  - a. What made it work?
  - b. What were your objectives for the organisation?
  - c. Do you think those objectives were specifically communicated to the participants during the programme?
  - d. In your view were those objectives met?
8. Have you ever been involved with a programme that didn't work so well?
  - a. If yes, can you say why it didn't work?
9. How do you evaluate theatre-based programmes?
10. Have you ever participated yourself in a forum theatre programme?
11. If yes, tell me about it, e.g. did you enjoy it, did you think it met your expectations, what did you like/dislike about it.



## **Appendix 5**

### **Interview Schedule : Participants**

1. Why did you attend the event?
2. What did you see as being the aim of the event for you? Were these aims made clear? Were they met?
3. What (if any) were your expectations? Were they met?
4. Thinking about the 'event', what worked well? Why? What didn't work so well? Why?
5. In your view did the scenarios/improvisations seem real?
6. How would you describe your engagement with the performances?
7. How would you describe the level of your participation in the event?
8. In your opinion did the event address (important) organisational issues for you? If so, did the event change your understanding or views of these issues and, if so, in what ways?
9. What (if any) parts of the event did you find challenging? What were these and why did you find them challenging?
10. Did the event offer any solutions to the issues being presented? If so, how were those solutions presented? (Aide-memoire – from the participants or actors/facilitators)?
11. Have you taken any specific actions as a result of attending the event? If yes, can you describe what you did? If no, can you say why not?
12. Have you discussed the event with colleagues, acquaintances, friends members of your family? If yes, did you discuss the issues raised or the process of the event, or both?
13. How do you think this event could be followed up?

## Appendix 6(i)

### Observation Schedule

- How was the event introduced?
- How many people attended – was it mixed in terms of faculty, gender, age (draw auditorium)
- Were outcomes/objectives clear?
- How much emphasis was there on participation?
- Did the scenes enacted appear to be improvised?
- Where was the event held? How far did the venue contribute (or not) to the audience's enjoyment of the session (e.g. could they all see and hear, was the stage area suitable for the 'performance')
- What issues were raised?
- How many people participated in the discussions?
- What type of interactions were observed (i.e. between actors and audience; between the audience) –(Describe them)
- How wide ranging was the discussions?
- Did all participants appear to be engaged?
- Did the facilitator enable free flowing discussion? How? (openness, style used)
- Did the facilitator allow participants to consider points?
- Were any particularly controversial issues raised? How was it dealt with?

**Appendix 6(ii)**

**Observation Coding Scheme** (adapted from Bryman, A. and Bell, E. (2007 p.167)

**Forum Workshop : Process**

Each cell = 10 seconds


**Notations**

**Facilitator:**

1. Asks group a question
2. Responds to a comment initiated by an individual from the group
3. Discusses the topic
4. Summarises the topic

**Actors:**

5. Ask a question
6. Respond to a question
7. Respond to a comment
8. Re-enact part of the scene

**Participants**

9. Asks a question
10. Makes a comment
11. Responds to comment from the facilitator
12. Responds to a comment from another participant
13. Silence

## **Appendix 7: Research Participant Information Sheet**

### **Organisational Theatre – Individual Learning? Perspectives on Theatre Based Interventions**

*(Working Title)*

**Researcher : Jan Rae  
Senior Lecturer,  
London South Bank University**

#### **Participant Information Sheet**

##### **Introduction**

I am a Senior Lecturer in HRM and Management at London South Bank University and Course Director for the MSc in Human Resources programme and am undertaking research for my doctorate into the use of theatre-based programmes to stimulate organisational and individual learning and change. This interest partly stems from my own interest in theatre – I studied drama for my degree, worked for several years in professional theatre and continue to watch, participate in and direct theatre productions and workshops (the latter non-professionally).

##### **The Research Context**

While the use of both arts and theatre based interventions has generated considerable interest in the management journals and there is a growing body of literature around the concept of organizational theatre, there has been less published research into the practice and impact of these activities particularly in the UK. My doctoral thesis aims to provide an empirical study of organisational theatre activities from the perspective of providers, commissioners and participants to explore the context, process and outcomes of such interventions.

More specifically the research will address the following:

- What is it about theatre-based interventions that support or inhibit learning and/or change?
- What is it about theatre-based interventions that differ from other types of learning and development interventions?
- To what extent do theatre-based interventions are a co-creation between consultants and participants and what impact does this have on the outcomes?

##### **What Data Will Be Collected?**

While the research does focus on Forum Theatre (in all its forms) and similar types of activity I am interested in any type of programme which uses the principles of Forum theatre and drama to stimulate learning, development and change within organisations. Data collected to date has included:

- Interviews with the event commissioner(s) and provider(s), participants at the event, the event facilitator(s) and actors;
- Observation (and participation) of an event/project;
- Observation of the project development process and related activities, for example, rehearsals.

##### **What Will Happen To The Data?**

Some or all of the data collected may be used as follows:

- As part of ongoing research into the use of theatre as a method for learning, development and change, for presentation at conferences and/or as part of the doctoral thesis;
- As part have an evaluation or discussion paper for either the commissioner and/or provider.

Anonymity of the participating organisations will be preserved at all stages of the research and similarly, interviewee data will be presented anonymously. Confidentiality will also be maintained and no information obtained from the interviews will be used except on the above basis. Subject to the agreement of participants interviews will be taped and transcribed; recorded material will be held

securely and destroyed after the completion of the doctorate.

If you have any queries please contact me at the address below.

Jan Rae  
London South Bank University  
103 Borough Road,  
London SE1 0AA

Tel: 020 7815 7734  
Mob: 07790385209  
Email: [jan.rae@lsbu.ac.uk](mailto:jan.rae@lsbu.ac.uk)

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