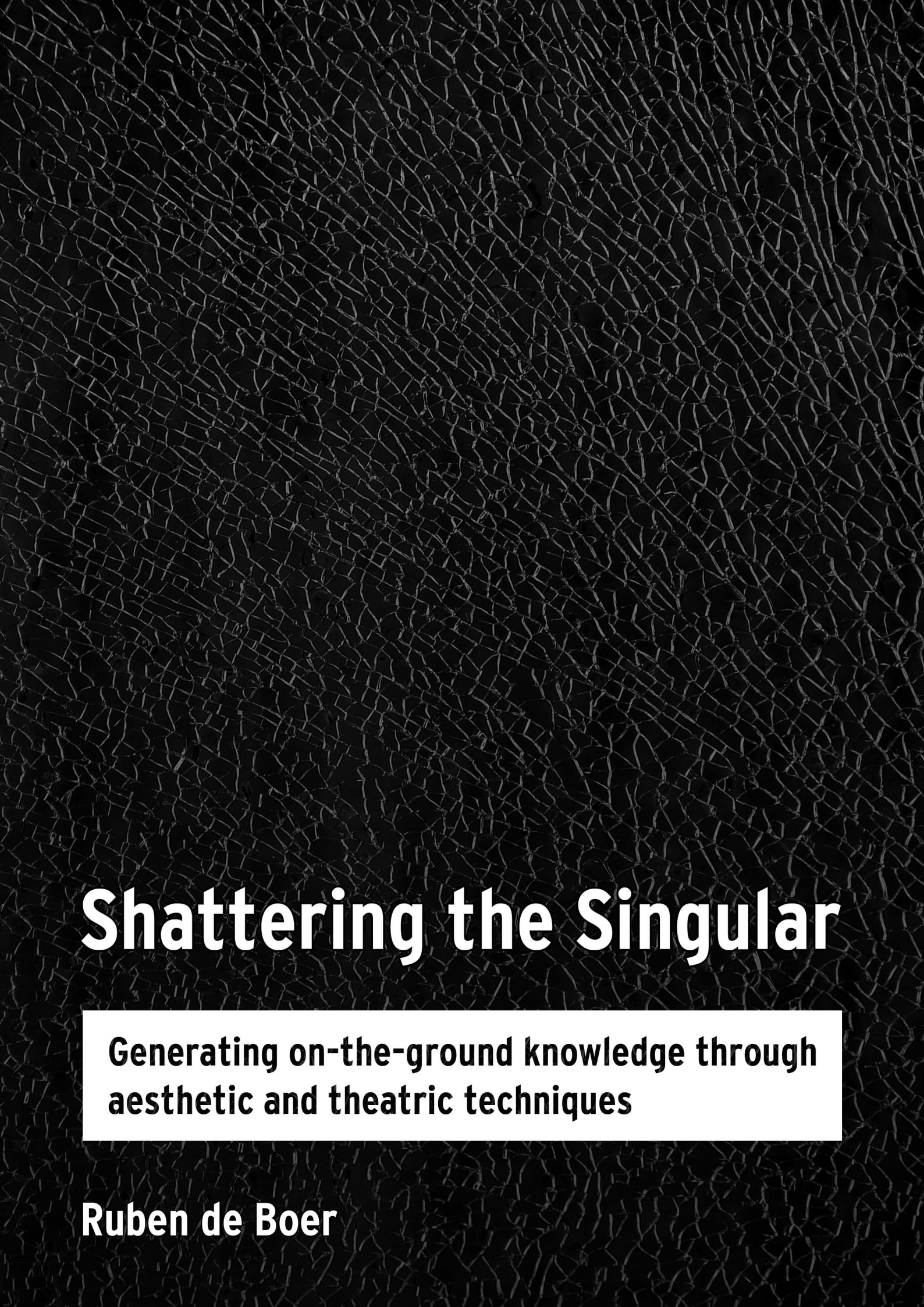

Shattering the Singular

Generating on-the-ground knowledge through aesthetic and theatric techniques

Ruben de Boer

SHATTERING THE SINGULAR

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Outside the street's on fire
In a real death waltz
Between what's flesh and what's fantasy
And the poets down here
Don't write nothing at all
They just stand back and let it all be
And in the quick of the night
They reach for their moment
And try to make an honest stand
But they wind up wounded
Not even dead
Tonight in Jungleland

"Jungleland" excerpt, written by: Bruce Springsteen.

CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

This thesis approaches and interrogates aesthetic and theatric techniques as a possible opportunity to generate on-the-ground knowledge—both in general and as part of the (re-)consideration of anthropological methods. The focus lies on the "Theatre of the Oppressed" ("TO"), a 'toolbox' of techniques which are rooted in a fertile soil of ethics, philosophy and theory—articulated by Augusto Boal, the founding father of TO. Theatre incorporates sounds, images, and emotions; it perpetuates beyond the boundaries of verbal language. The argumentation set out in this thesis is based on three months of ethnographic fieldwork in Los Angeles, between February and May of 2012. The bulk of this thesis is inspired by the stories and experiences of four collaborators: Barbara-June Dodge, Brent Blair, Mady Schutzman and Hector Aristizábal.

By taking a narrative approach—including the notion that knowledge is *storied*, rather than *classificatory*—theatre opens up to the opportunity to generate knowledge. I conceptualise TO-workshops as the intertwinement of narratives. It is *through* and *in* this intertwinement that knowledge is produced. This process occurs by engaging with narratives in TO-workshops. Narratives are inherently complex and fragmented. However, often there seems to be a tendency to 'cover up' the complexity and fragmentation of narratives. The narratives are posed as definitive, as if they are either 'true' or 'false'; they become "singular narratives". This, in turn, produces a view of the world, and of those being living *in* and *on* the world, as tangible and 'graspable' by (scientific) concepts. I will approach TO-workshops from three distinct perspectives. I will elaborate on three notions to interrogate and question singular narratives: Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "polyphony"; Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of "the fusion of horizons"; and Paul Feyerabend's notions of "guided" against "open exchanges". In these processes the complexity, contradictions, incoherency and fragmentation of narratives are acknowledged and critically interrogated. Thus, a singular narrative can be pried open.

PREFACE

"It's fun, but it's serious."

—Hector Aristizábal

The following patchwork of stories emerged during three months of ethnographic fieldwork in Los Angeles, between February and May of 2012, and the months of contemplating, reading, writing, and transcribing afterwards. I met and followed activists, educators, performers, playwrights, students in Applied Theater Arts, and teachers; I went wherever they took me and engaged with their views of the world, their work, and their dreams. These months were packed with participation in workshops, conducting interviews, engaging in conversations, tagging along during protests, laughing, playing, being astonished, et cetera. During these months I learned to navigate the diverse districts and cities within Los Angeles County: from the semi-quiet Long Beach to the overly crowded Venice Beach; from the seemingly endless rows of cardboard boxes and tents of Skid Row, to the quiet streets of Pasadena; and from famous Hollywood to infamous gang-ridden South Central; both during the hustle-bustle of daytime, and the equally vibrant—though sometimes gloomy—nighttime.

Los Angeles is a dynamic and contrasting city. The differences seemed extreme, but they all collapsed in one unbelievably vast urban jungle of asphalt, cars, concrete, palm trees and sandy beaches. As springtime unfolded, I slowly learned to manage in the City of Angels, and as the sun grew warmer and brighter each day, I opened up and soaked up the inspiration and stories I encountered. I did not need to be bored, noted Peter, my host for the first few nights: "if you are in Los Angeles and you are bored any time of the day, you need to pull your head out of the sand".

The result is a colorful patchwork of stories. All the amazing people I have met, all the ideas, all the experiences, and all the articles and books I have read, inspired the threads of this flamboyant patchwork. I am the weaver of the patchwork, and the choice of colors, materials and weaving techniques are carefully chosen—and is very personal. However, as any weaver, I could have chosen millions of other ways to weave, as there are many, many other stories imaginable that I wanted to or could have written. *But I did not.* Some have already been told, such as new

perceptions on gender for example; for some stories I am missing important material—for example, the practice of Theatre of the Oppressed; and for others I feel I do not have the skills (read: *authority*) to weave them through, about being a person of colour in Los Angeles for instance. In the end, I have chosen an approach that fits me best, at this point, which is a hermeneutical approach to the Theatre of the Oppressed.

Weaving this work has been a tricky practice. Partly because I plunged into a practice that sometimes frowns upon theoretical *"blah blah blah"*, as most of the times the practitioners are on their feet working with communities—often all around the world. On a number of occasions I heard criticisms of the number of people caught up in a 'circle jerk' kind of scientific endeavour as they expressed their disinterest in theory and its very nature. Thus, I represent both a long lineage of oppression by my white European forefathers, at the same time I represented the field of anthropology, a field partly to blame for horrors that occurred during the 'discovering' of the 'New World'. The fields of tension I had to navigate are those of actual context and concept, of engagement and reflection, of others' stories and my own interpretation, and between being an insider and an outsider at the same time.

* * *

The reason I did my fieldwork in Los Angeles is contingent, to say the least. I was inquiring, prior to my fieldwork, if friends and acquaintances in the Netherlands had any connections with anyone doing participatory and engaged theatre, outside of the Netherlands. One of the many replies I got back was from Luc Opdebeeck, director and founder of "Formaat", in Rotterdam. He mailed back, apologising for the fact he was very busy at the moment. He sent a second e-mail minutes later with the note: 'by the way, if you get the chance to work with Hector Aristizábal, take it. He is an inspiring person. Best, Luc'. So, a little nervously, I took the leap. Just a few weeks later I was waiting outside Union Station in Los Angeles for Hector and his partner Alessia to pick me up.

...and I started where they were and went with them, wherever they took me...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The generosity and openness that I experienced during my ethnographic fieldwork in Los Angeles is astounding and more than I could ever dream of. I would like to thank the following people for collaborating: Alessia Cartoni, Barbara-June Dodge, Brent Blair, Hector Aristizábal, and Mady Schutzman for their time and patience, and for letting me hang around with them, and having countless conversations. Henry Ong, Joe Goode, Stacie Chaiken, and Suzanne Santos for a peek into their lives, both as wonderful human beings and as brilliant performers and/or playwrights. Katherine Nigh, for letting me participate in her class and the inspiration she gave me. Mariella Saba, for taking me into her life of activism and theatre, and introducing me to others at Skid Row, giving me a completely different perspective on Los Angeles. Julianne Gale, for our inspiring conversation on gender and TO. Steve Susojev, for letting me crash on his couch, even when I arrived way past midnight, during my short trip to San Francisco. Helene Lorenz for letting me participate in her class, Shruti Purkayastha for the invitation for the class, and Kimiko Broder for connecting me to others and inviting me to passover. Juan Carillo for helping to organise the workshops. Moreover, I want to thank Agneta Josephson, Jale Karabekir, Katy Rubin, and Olivier Malcor for taking time and patience to answer a short questionnaire on gender and TO.

Thanks to Spark, Pete and Elliot at the local coffeeshop in Pasadena for agreeing to disagree, and, of course, the wonderful conversations on comics and movies, and the subtle differences between Europe and the United States.

Thanks to Diederick Raven for his time and inspiration, Sofie Smeets for the tutoring, and Yvon van der Pijl for her amazing co-tutoring, Chantal Stehwien for thinking along and editing, my dearest classmates with whom I spent countless days with in the library, and Albert Hofmann for the insights and inspiration. And, of course, all the others that I (unfortunately) forgot to mention.

I wish everyone all the best with their activism, art, performing, teaching, writing and all the other passions that give the world colour, compassion and hope!

—Ruben de Boer

PROLOGUE

The father has died

> "Augusto Boal was so kind and accessible. He was the perfect rockstar of his own techniques. Because—it's the 'come close thing'—he was very genuine, he just wanted to be with us."
>
> —Barbara-June Dodge

On May 2, 2009 Augusto Boal died at the age of 78. Boal was a Brazilian theatre director, writer and politician, and most importantly, the founding father of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" ("TO"), a form of participatory theatre with an aim to promote social and political change. His work, and Boal as a person himself, left a lasting impression on countless of people. The legacy he left behind includes a handful of books and an endless number of lives transformed by his work. Moreover, in every continent there are groups working with TO-techniques. Practitioners are using the techniques and embody the ethics, philosophy, and theory—that are foundational to Boal's work. TO does not seem to be disappearing as more and more practitioners foster an interest in these, and similar, techniques. Hector Aristizábal, a practitioner and friend of Boal himself, remarked: "the father has died. So now we are all fighting—consciously or not—for who are the inheritors. I heard Julian Boal, after his father died, say: 'No one is the inheritor. I have his last name, but I am not the inheritor'" (Aristizábal 2012a). The time after Boal passed away is characterised by the absence of a single key-figure spreading the techniques and the ideas; there is a proliferation of new techniques and hybrid forms—for better or for worse.

* * *

During the Brazilian dictatorship of the sixties, Boal and his troupe were doing theatre with a strong political message. Not unlike other authoritarian regimes, there was a fear of artists and cultural activists. Theatre had been a tool for awareness and social mobilization before that time and many cultural activists were arrested, exiled, or they simply 'disappeared'. The imaginative aspect of the arts is a risky business, as bell hooks[1] remarked: "the function of art is to do more than tell it like it

[1] The name "bell hooks" is the pen name of Gloria Jean Watkins, an activist, author and feminist. The name is

is—it is to imagine what is possible". This imagining of possibilities is precisely what military dictatorships despised. Boal continued to work with theatre, often having to carry a loaded gun on stage, in case of a raid by the military or police: "it was not paranoia, it was self-defence" (Boal 2003). Before long, in 1971, Boal was arrested, tortured and eventually exiled to Argentine. It was during the solitary four months of his imprisonment that his ideas around social and political change through theatre became more clear, and his opinions radicalised. After his release, each time he worked with a community and/or did a play, his ideas shifted. At one point he was already working with the suggestions of the audience—at that time, his troupe acted these out—and "then, after an angry woman was so dissatisfied with how Boal's actors interpreted her suggestions, that she came on stage and showed them what she meant" (Sierz 2009). This was a turning point in Boal's ideas. Having experienced this, Boal decided to include more participation by the spectator; the spectators became 'spect-actor'. The first attempt of systematizing his ideas was in the groundbreaking work *"Teatro del Oprimido"*, first published in 1974 in Portuguese, followed by the English translation—*"The Theatre of the Oppressed"*—in 1979.

At this moment, besides TO, a large number of participatory forms of art exist. The popularity and unicity of TO is partly due to the fact that Boal travelled the world, spreading his techniques and ideas, and also partly due to the striking combination of pre-existing ideas (Schutzman 2012a). TO is strongly influenced by: the pedagogy of Paulo Freire, in which engagement is central, and students are seen as having knowledge; by the ideas around theatre by Bertolt Brecht, for example the alienation effect (the *"verfremdungseffekt"*) and his notion of 'breaking the fourth wall'; and by the humor, whimsy and revelry of Brazilian carnival. Other examples of inspiration are Constantin Stanislavski's 'system of acting' and Jerzy Grotowski's 'poor theatre'. Moreover, the exceptionality of TO is also due to the systematic approach to techniques, as Boal was supremely articulate in setting out the core principles that ran through his teachings.

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deliberately uncapitalised.

INTRODUCTION

Breaking down, building up

> "In [participatory] theatre we not only come together to discover things about ourselves, about each other, about our communities, but then we get empowered to go on and do something about it. So theatre becomes a rehearsal for life."
>
> —Hector Aristizábal

The "Theatre of the Oppressed" ("TO") is one of many participatory art forms. TO can best be understood as a 'toolbox' with a wide range of aesthetic and theatric techniques. Even though TO stands for the "*theatre* of the oppressed", throughout this thesis I will refer to 'aesthetic and theatric techniques'. There are many techniques[2], mostly starting with "image theatre" (Boal 1999:xix), the making of images with the body while avoiding verbal language as long as possible, and 'dynamising' these images. Theatre is a 'structure' that incorporates images, sounds, emotion, et cetera. Mady Schutzman remarked about the adaptation of the work: "half of the time that I am doing Boal-work I am telling people: 'oh, by the way, this isn't a TO exercise, oh and by the way neither is that.' […] I bring so much writing into my workshop because I'm a writer. Is that Boal? Well, yeah, now it is, sort of. I think the reason we keep calling it Boal is *because Boal has more of a name than Schutzman does"* (Schutzman 2012c). TO-work is about building community, about healing, about resistance, about awareness, about overcoming oppression; it is all of those things. The approach central to this thesis is an epistemological and hermeneutical one, focussing on using aesthetic and theatric techniques to generate on-the-ground knowledge around a certain theme or topic[3].

Another way to look at TO is as a transnational organisation. However, because of disagreement on standardisation of the work—up to the point of official certificates for Joker—the organisation has never been made official. TO can be seen as a grassroots movement. It is a strictly non-violent approach of "new ways to combine local activism with horizontal, global networking"

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[2] For an introduction to the techniques I refer to Boal's books. For example, "Games for Actors and Non-Actors" (1999).

[3] In TO, the theme or topic is usually around some form of crisis or conflict. In this thesis I extend this notion to the generating of knowledge in general. It should be kept in mind that this is not, in my view, the main purpose of TO. What is crucial to TO—and my thesis—is the democratisation of knowledge and the senses.

(Appadurai 2002:23). Important to point out is that it would be misleading to speak of a transnational 'community' of TO-practitioners. Many practitioners are not aware of each others' presence or work, and many implicitly or explicitly disagree with the way other practitioners work. What *can* be said is that the collaborators of this research are more or less influenced by Augusto Boal's techniques and ideas, and—indirectly—by Paulo Freire and Bertolt Brecht. Each practitioner creates and gathers their own 'toolbox' out of their background, disposition, experience, interests and needs. At the same time, I have found that the underlying principles are being shared by (most of) the practitioners that I collaborated with—be it in a diluted or more pure form.

DISARRAY

> "Single vision is folly if it makes you think you see (or even glimpse) *the* truth, the one and only." (Feyerabend 2010:xiii)

The initial question central to my ethnographic fieldwork was about how practitioners in Los Angeles work with participatory theatre to engage with 'gender'. My initial approach went haywire as soon as I had participated in the first few workshops with TO-techniques, led by Hector Aristizábal and Barbara-June Dodge. I got an inkling that my start was wrong as soon as I realised much more is at stake than what meets the eye. The initial experience raised an endless stream of epistemological and hermeneutical questions, and a number of methodological questions concerning anthropology. I not only realised that it is much harder than I expected to do fieldwork on something that is meant to de-mechanise—and get someone *out* of their head and *into* your body—as academic training tends to do the reverse; I also realised that any attempt to 'define' or even start with concepts such as 'gender' would not only be problematic, it would defeat the object of the exercise.

During one of the classes on gender and theatre that I followed at the University of Southern California (USC), led by Helene Lorenz, one student shared a story of being rowdy at home. She got the response of a family-member: *'don't be so ghetto!'* Is this story about class, gender or race? It is about all of those things and much, much more. If we forfeit the investigation of the narrative—if we do not take a detour of critical interrogation—we cannot begin to imagine the complexity of the story.

Eventually I had to flush my research proposal down the drain—along with the concepts I had carefully chosen beforehand—and I slowly started to descend down the rabbit hole. For me, the structures become shackles, and I needed to find another approach. My journey went along

epistemology and hermeneutics, along performance theory and postcolonial studies, along the philosophy of science and—above all—the practice and foundational principles of the "Theatre of the Oppressed". The consequence of this defiance meant I needed to get back what actually mattered: the experience and narratives of ordinary life. I have chosen to start—with minimal fixed concepts—with the actual TO-practice, focussing on the practitioners, their methods and methodologies.

I might have opted for a literature-based study of TO, but have chosen to keep the reading of literature on TO at a minimum. The difficulty with literature is that it is unchanging, contrary to contexts—which are perpetually shifting. I slowly started to appreciate and embrace a genuine chaos. One of the struggles that permeates this thesis is the struggle between complexity versus coherence. I needed to show an "honest degree of disorientation" (Schutzman 2012b) and recognise that, inevitably, something would get lost in translation. By the same token, I needed to find some form of coherence, otherwise this thesis would simply be gibberish. My approach is not to verify or debunk any ideology, but to present a patchwork of narratives as fragments. In doing so, I will be staying true to the human condition, as ordinary life experience is complex and fragmented, as well. Together these fragments form a set of questions—and some, tentative, answers—around the deployment of aesthetic and theatric techniques to produce—collectively and democratically—on-the-ground knowledge around a certain theme or topic.

Another piece of the puzzle came from a truly unexpected angle. I was in San Francisco during the weekend of March 24, to watch the performance "When We Fall Apart" by the "Joe Goode Performance Group" ("JGPG"). I stayed with Steve Susoyev, and when I pointed to his size 10 or 11 (men's size) bright-red high heels, he jumped up and put them on. He paraded through the room and cheered: *'These make me feel so powerful!'* I remember countless of times being confronted with high heels as symbols of oppression. If that is the *only* truth, why did it make Steve feel so alive and powerful? Why is it a sign of oppression for one person, and a sign of liberation for the other?

ITINERARY

> "[Deconstruction] is not an enclosure in nothingness, but an openness towards the other." (Kearney 1984:124)

The journey I have set out in the following chapters is rather peculiar, as my ethnographic fieldwork is not based on 'a culture' but on the production of knowledges, and how theatre can break with

singular narratives. The patchwork of stories set out in this thesis is not chronological and coherent in any sense. As our ordinary life experience is complex and fragmented, so is this thesis. Each chapter approaches the central theme from a different angle. I do agree this might seem confusing. For example, the chapter "A narrative approach" and the "Vignette" look rather different *prima facie*—one is a Geertzian ethnographic technique and the other focuses on philosophy—but they are remarkably similar once the argumentation becomes more clear. These are fragments, which one should not extend to the whole. Moreover, science—in whatever form—makes static that which is fluid. This thesis takes the step into that river, knowing a second time will not be the same. Each fragment has its own structure and internal logic. The itinerary I have set out is much longer than what was previously planned. To make a valid statement in "Chapter Four: Opening up" and the "Coda", I must deconstruct the common sense around (the production of) knowledge up to a certain point. The taking of a detour is not a lack of direction or an inability to stay to-the-point, it is a degree of honesty.

* * *

First of all, to understand the methodological approach I have adopted, I will set this out in the chapter "A narrative approach". I will elaborate on the use of narratives and the position of knowledge within narratives. By explicitly avoiding looking for instant clarity—and, at the same time, finding solace in being disorientated—narratives are a solid foundation to refuse and question singular narratives. Knowledge in this approach can be seen as the creation of meaning—the process of *poiēsis*. Second, in the "Vignette", I set out a story of what a TO-workshop might look like. The chapters that follow will refer back to this. The basic ideas and techniques will become clear. Third, in "Chapter One: Foundations" I will set out the core principles of TO and how these reflect on my narrative approach. Crucial is the externalisation and sharing of narratives. By using humour, for example, narratives are 'detached' from the personal, and narratives can be critically interrogated and played with.

Then, when the basis is clear, I will show how a singular narrative can be broken in three distinct ways. In "Chapter Two: Shattering the singular" I will focus on the participants and a number of notions important in the generating knowledge; key to this is the recognition of the complexity of the event and the narrative, and the responding to a context (instead of in a dogmatic way). I will use Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of "polyphony" to explain how the singular narrative breaks by opening up to a polyphony of narratives. The second approach to the breaking of singular narratives will be preceded by the "Intermezzo", the story of Hector Aristizábal, and what he brings to the TO-practice. Then I will elaborate, in "Chapter Three: The Joker", on the position and role of

the Joker as they influence the production of knowledge. The Jokers are bound by anger, hope, and expectations. The Jokers incite an intertwining of narratives, where the ideologies of the participants, as well as the Jokers themselves will break and shift—and on-the-ground meaning is brought forth. For this, I will use Hans-Georg Gadamer's notion of the "fusion of horizons". In the final chapter, "Chapter Four: Opening up", I bring the TO-practice and anthropology together by looking at Paul Feyerabend's notions of "guided exchange" and "open exchange". I will extend the notion of the Joker in TO, to the role of the anthropologist.

One thing is certain: this thesis will never be finished, and there is much more to be said.

THE JOKER IS WILD

> "But then I found theatre as the place were I could invite the conversation, rather than go on and kill people."
>
> —Hector Aristizábal

There is an ever-increasing number of TO-practitioners—or, Jokers[4]—worldwide. Generally speaking, a Joker—or group of Jokers—will travel to a community, or invite a community to another place, either local or abroad. The location is usually a community centre, a theatre, a market place, or a factory. A community is often a pre-existing group of people who know each other. If individuals are unfamiliar with one another personally, then at least they share a position in society or share certain experiences. The communities that TO-practitioners work with are as diverse as one could imagine. The Joker is the person leading—'Jokering'—the workshop. When the theme is heavy, for example when the community is one of trauma-survivors, there is often a co-Joker to witness the process.

The Joker has often trained for years on end, by participating in workshops led by other Jokers, and by engaging in elaborative reflection. Properly Jokering is an art in itself as each situation, each intertwinement of stories, requires a different technique or approach. A lot of emotions can come up, and something can be triggered. Mady Schutzman reflected on taking risks, especially using humour: "it's tricky. I've seen people not find it very funny. I think you just keep asking. You do it—you take the risk—and then you say that anybody can go: *'enough!'* and we'll stop and we'll talk about it. And we'll shift the technique, if it feels like it's too much" (Schutzman 2012b). So it is the task of the Joker to continue monitoring the situation. So what is a Joker? And what are the responsibilities of the Joker?

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4 I will use "Joker" and "TO-practitioner" interchangeably.

> "As the Joker you have the responsibility to coordinate all the creations, and the creators. But you also have to take care not to impose your own view. You are not superior to anybody. You have your opinion, you have your intelligence, you can have all the qualities you have, but you never say I am like this or I have more knowledge of this; that is the basics of it. Why is it called the Joker? In Portuguese it is *'coringa'*, in Spanish *'comodin'*, but in English, unfortunately, Joker also relates us to joking. We say 'jokering' and not 'joking', because it means the wild card. […] So the responsibility is to learn more and more and know more and more, so that you can teach in many ways. That is a big responsibility. But you have to teach in a democratic way, to respect the other ones. When the audience want to discuss what they think, the Joker's responsibility is a moral responsibility above all. It is important not to use this privileged position to impose ideas, because it is a privileged position." (Boal 2003)

COLLABORATORS

> "They are the gardeners of the fertile soil of art-making."
>
> —Barbara-June Dodge

The population of my research consists of TO-practitioners in Los Angeles. The heterogeneity is apparent for both the 'toolbox' they carry, and the ethics, philosophy and theory they embody. Moreover, Jokers in general are not a homogenous group in any way; age, class, gender, et cetera[5]. The four main collaborators[6] are Barbara-June Dodge, Brent Blair, Hector Aristizábal, and Mady Schutzman. They participated in the (now non-existant) group called "CTO ATA L.A."[7], which consisted of a group of about eight colleagues and friends doing workshops with TO-techniques, partly to learn the techniques from each other, and partly to work in communities together. They have good memories of the time the group existed and learned a lot during that time. Eventually, the group ceased to exist because their schedules clogged, and everybody went their own way.

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[5] Mady Schutzman recalled that when Boal first came to the United States—in the early eighties—to train other practitioners, a lot of women (especially of colour) did not feel comfortable in the workshops. They were, above all, hesitant about leading (Schutzman 2012c). This raises a whole lot of questions I cannot elaborate on in this thesis.

[6] I am avoiding the notion of 'informant' on purpose, as it implies information or resources that I simply 'extract', or someone just handing me over information. This can better be seen as an active collaboration, thinking together and having a dialogue.

[7] An acronym for: "Centre for Theatre of the Oppressed and Applied Theatre Arts, Los Angeles".

Different Jokers, different styles

What my research collaborators shared was their experience with the TO-practice. Moreover, each Joker has his own style of Jokering. I have met many more practitioners—and activists, educators, performers, playwrights, students in Applied Theatre Arts, and teachers—each with their own distinct passions and styles. I have chosen to focus solely on the above-mentioned four, for the sake of a story that is as distilled as possible. I would not argue that my collaborators are in any way a 'representation' of the TO-practice in Los Angeles—let alone the United States or the world. However, the underlying principles of TO are shared by the practitioners—at least to some extend. The workshops I have participated in, as well as the conversations I had, raised fundamental epistemological and hermeneutical questions. These questions are not new, and there are no answers in sight; only more questions.

* * *

Focus on four collaborators

I met Barbara-June Dodge for the first time at the *"Plaza de la Raza"* in Lincoln Heights. Barbara-June is an energetic youth-theatre director and she has a whole lot of fun doing theatre. When we talked she reflected about her time with "CTO ATA L.A." and told me about the diversity of experience and talent in the group. She reflected, a little dreamy, about Mady: "her passion, her wonderful sense of humour, her sense of play, her history with the work" (Dodge 2012a). I remember meeting Mady for the first time at "Buster's", a homely café close to Mission Station in South Pasadena, and remembered her coming in with her curly head of hair and sunglasses in the bright Californian sun. Mady shared many, many stories of her many experiences, and I enjoyed the engagement and seriousness of our conversations.

Barbara-June told about the others: "Brent is kind of an epic, Greek, figure in the room. He really commands, right? He is a brilliant voice-teacher and is a vessel of a lot of wisdom. And he's got a heart as huge as the world itself" (*ibid*). Each time we met Brent greeted me with a warm smile. The time and patience Brent had to share his experiences, inspiration and ideas were amazing. He is working on a methodology called: "Liberation Arts and Community Engagement" ("LACE"), taking Boal's ideas much, much further. We would meet a number of times at the Starbucks on Hoover Street, just off the USC-campus, and talk about the destructive aspect of capitalism and dogmas, for example.

At last, Hector, who seems to have an endless supply of energy—except mid-afternoon, when he would often take a ten-minute nap—Barbara-June reflected: "he kind of drums things up, twists and use language and phraseology, and he comes in for a comment that surprises everyone,

including himself. And he is able to hold all of it, all the emotions, on his shoulders: *'yes, I will carry it"*" (*ibid*).

THE CITY OF ANGELS

The setting of my research is the city of Los Angeles, the second most populous city in the United States (after New York), located on the west-coast in the state of California. The city has a population of about four million people, and the rest of Los Angeles County is home to another twelve million. Often, when people refer to "Los Angeles", they mean the city alone. For the purpose of this thesis, I include the wider vast urban maze consisting of a number of cities and districts, called Los Angeles County. The city is demographically mixed[8]: about thirty percent is Caucasian, nineteen percent is white with a Hispanic or Latino background, about twenty-nine percent is non-white Hispanic or Latino, and ten percent is black. The rest are mainly Asians—just over nine percent—and around one percent Native-Americans. About sixty percent speak a non-English language at home (compared to forty percent in California and twenty percent in the United States), most of these non-English speakers are Hispanophones. The United States has no official language, but English appears to be the norm in the public sphere[9].

The workshops I participated in reflected this demography. Other aspects that are omni-present in Los Angeles (and California) are high homeless rates, poverty, inequalities concerning gender and race, and police brutality, to name a few. This context is reflected in the themes that come up during the workshops, making it another factor for the differences of the TO-practice around the world.

Demographic focus

My research was mainly focussed on the area between downtown Los Angeles and the districts South and East of it. This is not conscious choice, this is just the location of events, including the workshops, and the meeting-places with the TO-practitioners. I got in touch with other events and practitioners in other parts of the city, but due to time constrains I did not spread my focus to other parts of the city—or to the wider area of Los Angeles County. Another demographic focus would have raised a number of other questions.

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8 Source: "U.S. Census Bureau"; http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/06000.html.

9 As became clear during the workshops in "The Flintridge Center" in Pasadena on March 10, 2012. When we did a scene, provided by one of the participant, on the 'language friendly' aspect of public services (including emergency servies), I discovered that there are so little Hispanophones (or bi-lingual people) working there to give support.

METHODS

> "One way to help change the world is to transform the way we come to know the world." (McLeod 2010:313-314)

Renouncing a 'traditional' approach to my ethnographic fieldwork—of focussing on a certain concept, or a number of concepts, considering a certain community or group—left me with a number of challenges. First and foremost was a lack of direction. TO was the point of entry for my conversations. When asked what my ethnographic fieldwork was about I responded "Theatre of the Oppressed and gender". I rarely had to explain any further. The spinal cord of this thesis consists of about two dozen recorded conversations[10] with Barbara-June Dodge, Brent Blair, Hector Aristizábal, and Mady Schutzman. These conversations often started semi-structured, using a topic list, but after the initial dialogue the topic broadened to whatever came up. The subjects of these conversations were around activism, arts, core awakenings to inequalities and injustice, education, pedagogy, philosophy, politics and, of course, their experiences with the TO; conversations diverged from dreams to memories to the 'social reality'. Sometimes we talked about more traumatic experiences, but often talked about the TO-practice and their related passions.

The workshops I participated in were: two at the "East L.A. Rep", two at the "Flintridge Centre" in Pasadena—all led by Hector Aristizábal—another at the "Shakespeare Center L.A." led by Barbara-June Dodge, and a very short one at USC led by Rebecca Struch. Most of them were video-recorded for further analysis and referencing. I was able to look back on the workshops in excruciating detail (up to the point of frame-by-frame analysis). This, together with the reflections of a number of participants afterwards, the notes I rapidly took during the hustle-bustle of the workshops, and the reflections I did together with Alessia and Hector, gave me insights into the impact of the workshops. During the workshops a lot happens, and only a little bit is verbally confirmed or reflected upon[11]. Only tiny fragments of narratives are worked with during these workshops.

Beyond reflexive anthropology

During the workshops I was not only present, but participated by actively engaging with my whole body, sharing my own stories and trying to refrain from analysing too much. I kept in mind that I needed to be wary that "when we consciously adopt a scientific meta-language, we may irrevocably

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[10] I explicitly avoid the terminology of "interview", because for me this has a connotation of a monologue.

[11] For me, this raised a lot of questions on the limits of verbal language to anthropological research specific, and communitication in general. Again, unfortunately, I must leave it at this remark.

lose sight of the field's dynamic and interactive reality. […] as metalanguages can turn into dangerous and pedantic abstractions" (Nazaruk 2011:80). In a way, I tried to transcend the "reflexive turn" (*ibid:*73), the notion of the researcher becoming object of reflexion as the anthropologist influences the field and, thus, needs a transparent stance about their own position in—and influence on—the field. Another important notion is the notion of "double hermeneutics" (Giddens 1982:13), the insight that ordinary life and the social sciences continually and mutually influence each other.

TO has its own discourses revolving around the practice, and the ethics, philosophy and theory. This includes, but is not limited to, critical theory, "PAR" ("Participatory Action Research"), performance theory, postcolonial studies[12], and theatre studies. A great deal of the collaborators I have worked with are scholars and writers themselves. This, in turn, has a strong influence on how practitioners work with the communities—and, *vice versa*, the communities inspired my collaborators. In the end, besides using their writings, I had to position myself *between* the authors.

My own methodology is woven out of the narratives I brought in, as well as those of my collaborators. This means that the methodology I have 'used' as a justification of my research is a fluid process that came *through* and *out* of the the 'field'. This might be seen as a "triple hermeneutics", or I can (and will) simply abandon these—rather useless, in my opinion—concepts altogether. I will go beyond dialectics and towards a more complex and fragmented understanding of anthropology—through the approach of narratives. To close off, using narratives raises the important question of (dis)continuity of my field. The point about narratives is that they trancend spatial and temporal boundaries, and I am using this narrative approach. The work of authors that I use (whether that of my collaborators or other works) will have the same position as the narratives of my collaborators. As I have met collaborators, I also 'met' books.

Some of the literature I have used can be seen as 'unreliable'. Paul Feyerabend, for example, changed his own viewpoint regularly, even adopting opposing ideological positions. However, as I argue throughout this thesis, contradiction and incoherency are inherent to narratives—and thus, literature. I have used works as inspiration, and I will point out contradictions whenever I find this necessary. Finally, most of the literature I have used are interrelated: Paul Feyerabend was familiar with Bertolt Brecht and Ludwig Wittgenstein's work, and Wittgenstein's work is, on its turn, an inspiration for Charles Taylor and Tim Ingold, and all the authors are inspired by Martin Heidegger, to some extend, et cetera. The narratives are intertwined, not merely those we 'tell', but also the authors that I will bring forth. This, in turn, reveals the complexity and the tentative nature of this patchwork of narratives that I have set out.

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[12] This does not refer to a condition in history, but to "representations, discourses and values" (McLeod 2010:279).

POSITIONALITY

> "The standpoint from where we read the world is both a privilege and a loss, a vantage and a limit." (Mcleod 2010:313)

During the ethnographic fieldwork I became acutely aware of my positionality[13]. The question I have asked myself over and over again: 'What can I—from my position—tell about the practice of TO?' My background is threefold: as an anthropologist, as an artist (a painter, photographer, and having a strong interest in theatre), and as a ethnographic fieldworker. This threefold positionality has a strong influence on this thesis. I have felt a strong sense of implementing arts in ordinary life, and I have felt—since studying for my master degree in anthropology—that arts and sciences are not mutually exclusive, and that the only exclusivity is to be found in the dogmatism of both practices—especially science. Brent Blair, himself being white and gay, was extremely articulate in the positionality of an anthropologists or TO-practitioners. I asked him whether I could and/or should be researching the TO-practice and gender[14], Brent responded:

> "Hetero-normal gender is the gender of power. So as a heterosexual male, white male, you occupy a position of—at least—three powers. But you are curious about the powerlessness. So *here you employ allies with you*, to have conversations with people of power, and queer people of colour, or women of colour […] you are going to have these dialogues with them, to help you co-write this study." (Blair 2012b)

This curiosity and openness was at the same time paired with a sense of insecurity and vulnerability. Participating in the workshops meant I had to reveal not only my positionality, but also my experiences. It is just part of the deal of participating in a TO-workshop. And my guess is that both the openness and vulnerability was felt by my collaborators and other participants during the workshops.

Another, funny, confrontation with my positionality was when I went to visit the "L.A. Poverty Department", Skid Row's community theatre group, on invitation by Mariella Saba. I walked—rather hesitantly—around to find the location, which was in the middle of Skid Row. Arriving at the door I heard one of the company members—who was black—shout to a participant: *'Look, there's a white guy at the door, go get him!'* My own position obviously influenced my

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[13] I am using the notion of "positionality" in the sense of embodying certain narratives, including a position of class, gender, and race—and thus including dynamics of power. The notion of power I will set out in the chapter "A narrative approach" below is an extension of this notion approached through narratives.

[14] At the time of this dialogue, I was in the limbo of whether or not I wanted to focus on TO and gender.

research, to what extend I can only guess. But a few weeks into my fieldwork I decided, very consciously, to downplay any attempt to include anything about gender and/or oppression, as there is a distance of my own narrative as a white heterosexual male to theirs. However, this does not mean that I do not have any embodied knowledge on gender, as a part of my positionality, but meaning that whatever I will write down will remain one-sided, unless I have much longer for my research to engage more with theatre. The elaboration of my position should not to be "misunderstood for being conflated with self-centeredness […] the author's intentions may be seen not as reflexive but as rooted in conceit" (Nazaruk 2011:77), it means I consciously decided to shift my focus and at the same time refrain from falling for the detached use of concepts and definitions. Both would only be counter-productive, as will become clear throughout this thesis.

A NARRATIVE APPROACH

> "It is in the art of storytelling, not in the power of classification, that the key to human knowledgeability—and therefore to culture—ultimately resides." (Ingold 2011:164)

> "Truth isn't the reward of free spirits, the child of protracted solitude, nor the privilege of those who have succeeded in liberating themselves. Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraints." (Foucault 1980:131)

> "The fragmentation of ourselves and our communities never was and never will be repaired, because it is not the sign of anything broken to begin with." (Tedder 2010:75)

There are many stories human beings tell about themselves, each other, and their communities. A 'culture' can be seen as an almost endless multiplicity of interwoven narratives (Ingold 2011:142). This interweaving is complex, contradictory, fragmented, incoherent and mutable. Narratives include, but are not limited to: desires, discourses, dreams, fears, ideologies, memories, music, myths, and viewpoints, each with their own impetus. However, often only a single story is told, as if only that story 'truly' matters. Such a definitive narrative reduces the complexity and contextuality of these narratives.

I will argue that revealing the complexity and incoherency *beyond* the 'simplicity' of definitive stories are necessary to generate on-the-ground knowledge on a certain theme or topic, as these definitive narratives give only partial understanding of what human beings do and experience. Moreover, narratives are an important approach to dynamics of power, by looking at the process of posing a narrative as definitive. Narratives and storytelling are crucial to the human condition; "stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanise" (Adichie 2009). Engaging with fragmented narratives through the aesthetic and theatric techniques, of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" ("TO") has the ability to humanise. Fragments are approached *as fragments*—celebrating the richness of human experience—and not as definitive narratives. No subject or ideology becomes the object of other subjects.

Transcending the subject

The methodological approach I have adopted is a focus on narratives. I distinguish myself from "narrative discourse", and the related "narratology", as these have a very technical approach and focus on the 'text' (in a postmodern sense)—much less on the interpretation and understanding of the text—and mostly work retrospective (Genette 1990). Moreover, the notion of "narrative identity" focusses on the 'self' (whether this is interpreted in the light of "sameness" or "selfhood"), implying some form of coherency (Wood 1991:189). Science has the tendency of making static that which is fluid. In the TO-workshops I have participated in, I have noticed that oppression often happens through the voices of loved ones. For example a young, androgynous woman, who felt the 'pressure of heteronormativity' very strong from her grandmother, who wanted a *granddaughter*. A structuralist account of this narrative would only misguide us.

I tend to move away from a "disengaged first-person-singular self" (Taylor 1993:169), in which the 'I' is the locus of representations and is quite separate from ones' own body and other subjects or bodies. Modern 'western' science has been predicated on classification as the prime mode of understanding. Anthropologist and philosopher Tim Ingold (1948 -) places this notion of *vertically* integrated knowledge against *horizontally* integrated knowledge (2011:160). All the elements in a vertically integrated knowledge system have "intrinsic characteristics that are given quite independently of the context in which it is encountered, and of its relations with the things that presently surround it, that preceded its appearance, or that follow it into the world" (*ibid*). On the contrary, horizontal integrated knowledge transcends the spatial discontinuity between the 'I' and the 'other'; and the temporal discontinuity between past, present and future. It brings it together in a narrative sequence, because "past occurrences are drawn into present experience. The lived present, however, is not set off from the past of the story. Rather, past and present are continuous" (*ibid:*161). The same counts for the bridging of myth and tradition (Wood 1991:56;59)

In my argumentation I focus on the 'I' as engaged in practices (Ingold 2011:12; Taylor 1993:169), following the ideas of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ludwig Wittgenstein. What we *do*—how we perform in everyday life—cannot be explained through representations of our social reality, as "it flows from an understanding that is largely inarticulate" (Taylor 1993:173). Integral to my approach is the inarticulate backdrop[15]—the context—of the narratives we tell about ourselves and each other. For Heidegger such backdrops "embody a ways of understanding and coping with things, people, and institutions" (Dreyfus and Rabinow

[15] This notion of a backdrop might have a strong analogy with the notion of "habitus" by Pierre Bourdieu (1984:170). This can best be conceptualised as embodied dispositions. However, I am not fond of the strongly Marxist terminology. Especially of the interrelated notions "field" and "capital" (Pels 1992:12) as these "fields" are relatively autonomous and the subject has an impetus towards gaining resources, which depending on the field and the access. Power, for Bourdieu, lies in the individuals' access to resources in a certain field. Contrary to Bourdieu's idea of more or less separated fields, narratives flow through and perpetuate different fields.

1982:xvii).

This backdrop is part of the narratives we 'tell' *through* our everyday performance[16] and contains meaning. This points us towards the 'I' as a 'hive', a multiplicity, of (rather fragmented) narratives that flow out and through the subject. The subject simultaneously narrator and narrated. This is a more continual (*not* consecutive) approach compared to classification. Subjects are, therefore, impossible to be narrated through coherent, chronological, definitive narratives, or to be 'grasped' by a set of concepts, models and/or theories; at least not without losing much of the richness of ordinary life experience and the narratives we embody (Taylor 1993:173).

Narratives and dynamics of power

A narrative understanding of power moves away from the individual that 'has power', to the "power to define" (Smith 1999:58). I extend the approach of dynamics of power set out by Michel Foucault (1926 – 1984). For Foucault, "truth is power" (1980:133). It "forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a *productive* network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression" (*ibid:*119; emphasis added). Important here is that in spite of the fragmentation, human beings still have the ability to comprehend, both themselves and each other. This should be understood by a tendency towards coherency, as an ongoing process towards an ideal, wherein the complexity and fragmentation of interwoven narratives are 'overruled' and posed as coherent, definitive, and 'simple'. This is what I will call "singular narratives". It is a process of "substituting complex pictures for simple ones while striving somehow to retain the persuasive clarity that went with the simple ones" (Geertz 1973:33). The richness of ordinary life experience eludes our attention when we focus solely on singular narratives. Thus, in my narrative approach, power is 'located' within the ongoing process of a tendency towards coherency. When we see that some narratives get a foothold, where others do not, it is important to ask the questions: 'Who 'speaks' whose 'language'?' and 'Who makes a narrative a definite narrative?'

Paul Ricœur (1913 – 2005) calls this process, this tendency towards coherency, "emplotment" (1994:142), and points us towards the presumed chronology and completeness of biography as an ideal narrative, because "when we read a text we always assume its completeness, and only when this completeness proves mistaken—i.e. the text is not intelligible—do we begin to suspect the text" (Gadamer 2004:294). A life-story is chronological in the sense that a person is born, and will stop breathing at one point. However, the subject—as a 'hive' of fragmented

[16] I could have opted using Erving Goffman's "The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life" (1959), Eugenio Barba's "The Paper Canoe: Guide To Theatre Anthropology" (1995), or Richard Schechner's "Performance Theory" (1988;2004). However, these works have a strong emphasis on the rituals aspect of performance. I tend to avoid this.

narratives—is never this coherent and chronological. Within the logic of a biography as an ideal narrative, a fragment is only meaningful as part of a larger, 'fuller', narrative. Ambiguity, in this case, is seen as a sign of weakness, instead of a sign of riches.

Independent filmmaker, feminist, and postcolonial theorist Trinh Minh-Ha remarked on this process about the role of other subjects: "you try and keep on trying to unsay it, for if you don't, they will not fail to fill in the blanks on your behalf, and you will be said" (Ashcroft *et al* 2006:246). In this case, "you will be said" means becoming an object to the other. The subject is always mediated by this process to *produce* actions and events as recognizable and calculable (Ricœur 1994:148). Thus, the process of emplotment *produces* a world-view and a view about those subjects living *in* and *on* the earth—as graspable and understandable—, because words, concepts and categories simultaneously express the social reality and construct it (Pels 1989:10).

Fragments and universals

These dynamics of power point us towards the questioning of emplotment as an ontological, *a priori*, given. In what other way can we conceptualise it? Anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing writes in her brilliant ethnography *"Friction: An Ethnography of Global Connection"*, on the clear-cutting of the Kalimantan forest in Indonesia, that 'universal' ideas are tentative and always are formed through collaboration. Tsing writes that "we might thus ask about universals not as truths or lies but as sticky engagements" (2005:6) and continues: "to see generalization to the universal as an aspiration, an always unfinished achievement, rather than the confirmation of a pre-formed law" (*ibid*). Important here is the idea of a process: it is in constant becoming—just as human beings are 'becoming' as their narratives perpetually unfold. It is a process of creating a common language. However, "collaboration is not necessarily good for all parties" (*ibid:*161), as postcolonial studies have showed again and again, whenever the collaboration is taken for granted. Dipesh Chakrabarty writes about the pervasive aspect of this tendency towards coherence, and thinks out loud if we could imagine a world,

> "one in which we stay—permanently, not simply as a matter of political tactic—with that which is fragmentary and episodic? *Fragmentary*, not in the sense of fragments that refer to an implicit whole, but in the sense of fragments that challenge, not only the idea of wholeness, but the very idea of the fragment itself (for, if there were not any wholes, what would fragments be fragments of?)" (2002:35)

Narrative knowledge

The fragmentation and complexity of the narratives is a premise for my approach on the generating of knowledge. Thus, "rather than supposing that people apply their knowledge in practice, we would be more inclined to say that they know by way of their practice" (Ingold 2011:159). These practices are approached as "an ongoing engagement, in perception and action, with the constituents of their environment" (*ibid*). My approach is one of knowledge that is narrated, not classificatory. An outcome is that "stories always, and inevitably, draw together what classifications split apart" (*ibid:*160). Ingold continues, explaining:

> "For the things of this world *are* their stories, identified not by fixed attributes but by their paths of movement in an unfolding field of relations. Each is the focus of ongoing activity. Thus in the storied world, […] things do not exist, they occur. Where things meet, occurrences intertwine, as each becomes bound up in the other's story. Every such binding is a place or topic. It is in this binding that knowledge is generated. To know someone or something is to know their story, and to be able to join that story to one's own. Yet, of course, people grow in knowledge not only through direct encounters with others, but also through hearing their stories told. To tell a story is to relate, in narrative, the occurrences of the past, bringing them to life in the vivid present of listeners as if they were going on here and now." (*ibid*)

The binding of stories can happen either through *telling* a story, as in a TO-setting, by being externalised and shared. Embodying a story, by acting it out through theatre, and thereby embodying the consequences, the subject gets truly entangled in the narrative. Not only the subjects' 'own' narratives, but also those of other subjects. By embodying these narratives and their consequences, a collective inquiry and questioning commences. In TO these narratives are externalised and shared—and critically interrogated.

Working with theatre becomes a poetic act. The word "poetry" derives from the Greek *poiēsis*, which means "to make" or "bringing forth". The intertwining of narratives *creates meaning* within the context and field of relations. The inarticulate background and tendency towards coherency is brought in. It is a process of moving beyond the distinction of being and knowing (*ibid*). By starting to investigate these fragmented narratives, and working 'up' from there, it becomes clear what or who 'speaks through' the narrative. It is a process of defeating fixed concepts—and intuition in general—by experimenting through theatre. Moreover, *starting* with this conceptual knowledge leaves out part of the process of experimentation. In TO knowledge is

reclaimed from the hands of so-called ‘experts’; they can only disclose these singular narratives and not the richness of ordinary life experience.

During one of my conversations with Mady Schutzman we talked about the unicity of TO. Mady remarked that doing TO gives insight in the “obituated performance that you haven’t found a resolution for”, and continued: “you are not trying other interventions because you are not thinking about them, […] because you have internalised so many voices” (Schutzman 2012b). I interpret this as a person caught up in the *status quo* of an (internalised) singular narrative. I argue this counts for both the inquiry and questioning during the performance in a TO-setting, as well as the performance of ordinary life, partly because they are inseparable. Every action has a certain openness, and within each action lies a multiplicity of narratives. In other words, by recognizing narratives as complex, and recognise their fragmentation, we see that “the singular phenomenon opens up as you go deeper into it” (Ingold 2011:233). Going deeper is through inquiring, questioning, and critical interrogation. Hector Aristizábal similarly remarked: “this work creates a platform for democratic inquiry through aesthetics” (Aristizábal 2012b). All in all, my approach to TO is through the intertwining of complex and fragmented narratives. Similarly, I approach my ethnographic field as such, and attempt to retain as much of this aspect as possible; by refusing to create a singular narrative of TO in Los Angeles.

Vignette[17]

"Let's just get started. There are always people stuck in traffic in Los Angeles, they can join in later" says the practitioner—the 'Joker'—leading the workshop today. I am sitting in a circle of chairs with about two dozen other participants, anticipating that which is to come. "Just put the chairs aside", says the Joker who is already fired up, "let's play!" It's a warm and busy day outside in this part of Los Angeles; the outside air is a toxic mixture of salty sea and exhaust fumes. Fortunately for us, the space we are gathered in is fresh and cool. The participants are both Anglophones and Hispanophones, and some are familiar with each other, some not. My guess is that the youngest participant is about sixteen or seventeen, and the oldest probably in their late-sixties. The chairs are put against the sides, and we gather in a circle, standing. I can see some faces look a little nervous, while others are full of energy and have a big smile on their face. I can't wait to get started.

* * *

Claiming the space and releasing the energy

The Joker asks the woman on his left to say her name and make a gesture that fits her mood. The woman steps forward and makes a gesture like she is tracing an invisible rainbow and says: "Marta!" The Joker says: "and now everyone", and all the participants repeat after her—each taking a step forward and tracing an invisible rainbow—saying: "Marta!". Marta laughs. We continue clockwise. A lot of different names and different gestures. We all laugh each time a gesture is made or repeated; all we do is mirror, including all the 'extra' movements that are made: the middle-aged man sniffing his nose, a girl who is nervously fumbling with her sleeve, and the woman playing with her hair before making her gesture.

A knock sounds on the door and two young woman come in, "I'm sorry, there was traffic jam" explains one of them. "Please, introduce yourself", asks the Joker, and the women introduce themselves: "Anna" and "Mara". The groups mirror their gestures, including the *"uhm"* prior to

[17] *Please note:* the vignette that follows is a collage of the workshops I participated in throughout my ethnographic fieldwork in Los Angeles. The workshops were led by different Jokers, with different participants, on different times and in places. However, the elements of the collage are as exact as possible. This includes quotation of the participants and the Joker(s). All names are fictive.

their names and a nervous giggle. They look shocked but burst into laughter just moments after, as they realise everybody has been mocked, not just them. The Joker remarks: “Crazy isn’t it? Each person has a whole alphabet of bodily language”.

The workshop continues: “Now move around the room, just walk around”. We start to walk around the space, which looks like an old warehouse—high ceilings, big horizontal rolling gates, fifteen-hundred square meters, and a incredible echo that exacerbates the sounds of laughter, play, and the energy. The group is moving around in circles, with some people following each other. “Try to fill the whole space with the group”, instructs the Joker, “and every time you pass somebody you connect with your bodies—with your shoulders”. The participants start to pay attention to each other; we have to claim the space with the group. Each time two participants—I can see even three or four people together, crossing paths—connect with their shoulders. Sometimes it is just a quick touch, and sometimes they take their time to really make connection, depending on whether they know each other and their familiarity with physical contact.

We continue to walk around. I notice that everybody is participating in their own way, depending on their age and physical abilities. “And now connect with your knees, in groups of five!”; the participants flock together—I hesitate because one group is already with five, I quickly shift to another group. We get more similar requests. “And now you are late for an appointment, you are in rush!” and everybody picks up their pace. Some of the participants are shooting around like rockets, I pick up my pace too and really enjoy the energy. “Okay, now when I say ‘freeze’ you freeze, and when I say ‘go’ you go”, shouts the Joker. “Freeze!”, and all the participants abruptly stop, some almost tripping over their own shoes, one participant can barely avoid Anna—who was about to pass, and reacts just a little faster. “Go!”, and everyone starts walking again, “so now when I say ‘jump’, you jump, and when I say ‘floor’ you touch the floor”.

The instructions are coming faster and faster. “Oh and when I say ‘head’ you touch your head, and when I say ‘butt’ you touch your butt.” Some participants release a little giggle. “Freeze! Jump! Go! Butt!” all the participants follow the instructions, they stop walking, jump, start walking, and then slap their butts, laughing but still concentrated because the instructions are fast. The instructions change, and now it gets complicated; “When I say ‘head’ it’s butt, and ‘butt’ is head, ‘floor’ is jump and ‘jump’ is floor”. Some faces look a little confused: *“Ayudo!”*. Suddenly the Joker shouts: “freeze!”; some participants stop and then hesitantly start walking again. This is a serious case of mental re-programming. “Go!” this time everyone gets it and stops. The Joker continues with the instructions, faster and faster, and some participants start to make more and more ‘mistakes’. When finally the Joker shouts: “jump, butt, freeze, head, head, jump, floor, go, head!”—I lost the instructions half-way—the space fills with shuffling, jumping, slapping, and then an explosion of laughter and screaming, because no-one was able to keep up. Everyone is cracking up.

* * *

Externalising and sharing narratives

All the participants are beaming with energy. Tom, still panting from the exercise, says to Michael, who is standing next to him: "*Fuck*, I feel so alive". The Joker goes with the energy and says: "So our workshop is on gender, let's explore this interesting topic", then thinks for a bit and says, "You are going to answer a sentence with an image. The sentence is 'What it means to be a women is'. Now close your eyes and make the gesture, an image", and before anyone can respond, he continues *"Un, dos, tres, acción!"* We all close our eyes and make a gesture. "Now freeze if you have it." I can hear some participants shuffling with their feet. "Now open your eyes and look at the others." I open my eyes and see two participants having their hands on their cheeks; one participant has one hand on her heart, and one hand around their ear in a cone; another participant is holding her breasts; another has a raised fist.

All the images—all the gestures and expressions—are different, there is not a singular 'truth'. "Now look at each others' images and come closer to the people you think look like your image. Try to create families of images together, but don't speak." Everyone starts moving—still holding their images—inspecting the images of other participants. As a result five groups form. "Allright", says the Joker and points to one group, "this group, hold on to your images, the rest can relax". The Joker turns to the other participants, "Can you respond, what do you see?" We respond: "Motherhood", "caring", "power of life", more and more participants start responding. "What else?" And the participants continue: "holding", "nurturing", "guidance", I add: "carrying a burden". The Joker says: "Images are polysemic. We see what we see, everything is perfect. What about the second group?". The second group finds their images again, the rest of the participants respond: "Compassion", "stress", "heart", and another participant jumps in: "connection of intelligence and heart", "intuition", "sympathy". We continue until all the groups showed their families of images. A vibrant dialogue is sparked among the participants as stories are being shared. I'm surprised by the diverging interpretations and understanding. The Joker closes the exercise off: "Allright, shake it out everyone!"

The workshops continues. The Joker asks if all the participants—whatever their 'gender identification'—will respond to three questions

"I knew I was a girl when,"
"I knew I was a boy when,"
"I knew I was neither when."

and continues: “Here is some paper and a couple of felt pens, you’ve two minutes to answer these questions on paper. And keep your tip on the paper, keep writing”. The space is filled with silence, except for the screeching of the felt on the papers. Some participants are writing some loose sentences, others are filling their papers on both sides and silently ask for more paper, it feels strange to think back on those events that made such an impact. “What I would like to do next is in smaller groups. First, can any one of you share anything about what you were doing? One phrase, perhaps one phrase?” Adriana comes forward: “I knew I was a girl when I was laughed at by the mothers of the boys of my baseball-team, when I asked why I didn’t get to wear a cup, because the boys were always playing drum on their cups and I liked that”. Some chuckles resound.

“Now I want you to share the stories in small groups. Make groups of three. One will tell something about what they have just written, the other will interview that person, and the third one will watch the interviewee closely and look at the gestures”, instructs the Joker. We start to share our stories, asking questions, and making mental notes about the gestures. “Any day it can be different too, it is always moving”, remarks one of the participants in my group of three when we are sharing the stories. “Now switch until everybody has shared a story”, says the Joker and when we are finished says: “Now choose one of those gestures for each person and combine the gestures into a small scene. You can make sounds if you like, but try to talk as little as possible”.

The groups start rehearsing so everyone gets the gesture of the others. “All the gestures are in the pot. And they are for everybody. First it’s mine, and now, it’s everyones’”, remarks the Joker. The first group starts to perform their ‘act’. They concentrate, look at each other for a cue, and then start simultaneously shout “*Motherfucker!*” and make a movement as if they are kicking an invisible person in front of them, they continue: “We are going to celebrate!” and stretch their arms in a cheerful gesture, and then: “Get off of me!” and make a gesture as though they are wiping a person off their lap. The whole scene lasts no longer than thirty seconds. All the other groups play their own scenes.

The stories of the participants, and the collages of stories in the acts, are compressed into gestures. The other participants don’t know the stories behind the gestures, but they get some of the images and project their own meaning. One of the participants, Alex, reflects: “With the movements they were really communicating with each other. It is almost like your gestures are intrusive to the others”. Then Alessia, who participated in the scene, remarks: “The gesture with ‘*motherfucker*’ didn’t feel right, it was so external—so alien—to my body”. The Joker remarks: “It is like a conversation between this story and your body”. After each group has shared their gestures, the Joker asks us to respond, “What caught your attention?”. Someone responds: “I really want to know what is behind the gestures, what is their story?”. She has to hold her curiosity; “We can explore them later on”, reassures the Joker. Stories about families, about growing up in Mexico or Iran,

about experiences of violence and poverty, and memories, mythologies, dreams, viewpoints, all collapse in acts of just thirty or sixty seconds, and *together we make meaning out of it*.

* * *

Digging in

After this initial exploration—and a small coffee-break—the workshops continue to explore the stories and the gestures. "Let's take some of the images we have seen today and explore them", says the Joker, asking the participants: "which of the stories would you like to explore?"; a roar of stories and questions come forth. "So how many would like to explore the story of Mark?" asks the Joker and continues, "How about the story of Anna, and of Marta? Just raise your hand, how many?" Each time participants raise their hands and we continue to vote for the stories. Sometimes a participant shares just one or two sentences of their story, so the other participants have an idea of what their story is about.

Finally, we chose the story of Gabriela, whose story was behind the gesture of wiping a person off ones' the lap, with the words "Get off of me!" Gabriela's group comes forward and sits in three chairs that are set up in a row, facing the other participants. "Can you tell us a bit more about the scene?" asks the Joker. Gabriela explains this is was the first time she realised she was growing up as a woman, and at the same time realised she was different from her father. When watching TV together, Gabriela was always allowed to sit on her fathers lap; then suddenly she was no longer allowed to do so. What confused her was that her sister—who was a little younger—was still allowed to sit on her father's lap. The gesture opens the door to the story of Gabriela growing up and of her family. This narrative seems to open up the door to a much larger question—for example, the stories about 'gender'. The Joker remarks: "The scene is a question, and theatre is a laboratory".

Now the scene is acted out again. "Does anybody want to respond?" is followed by another roar of emotions, ideas and stories echoing throughout the space. One of the participants asks Gabriela: "Did you still think it was okay to sit on your fathers lap?". The Joker jumps in: "I am sorry, but I have to intervene. What you see here is different for each one of us. So for the process it is best—at least for now—to avoid judgement of good or bad. Not that we don't have that, we are full of it, I am full of these judgements. In this work I try to avoid going in that direction because that will divide the room immediately". I see other participants nod, they agree that ideology has the tendency of dividing the room. A number of other participants respond to the scene. "Try to see if we can explore the scene—which is no longer *her* scene, because this is not her father, and she is not her sister", says the Joker, pointing towards the participants playing the father and the sister,

"these are two characters, two symbolisations of those people. We are going to take license to explore the scene, beyond the fact that it's inspired in her life".

"What are the themes embedded in this scene?" asks the Joker; the participants respond: "Loss of innocence", and another participant adds, "Well, for me, it's not necessarily innocence but 'loss'". Others call out, variously, "rupture", "first she is young, but it is no longer the same", "fear from the father", "secrets", "the status has changed", and "that prior connection they had is interrupted, it is no longer there". One of the participants concludes: "There is no explanation, no communication at all. It's like a fact. But you don't know why, because *he* doesn't know why", pointing towards the participant playing the father. "So there are many topics in such a small scene" remarks the Joker, "What else do we see?" The participants continue with a seemingly endless train of thought: "sadness", "loss". The Joker then asks: "Does this happen in life? Does this happen in our lives?" and the participants nod: "yes, it does". The group continues to collectively explore the topic. Now, the Joker asks: "Please, stand behind Gabriela and place a voice that you think might be in her head, and place it in the scene—where does it come from?" Hesistantly, one participant comes up. Then more and more participants, one by one, place a voice in the scene. One participant stands next to Gabriela and hides in her clothing. She whispers: "It feels as if I'm invisible" (see: "film-still one" on page 28).

The Joker continues: "Now we are going to do the scene again, you can shout *'stop!'* and then you can replace Gabriela". The scene rolls again. Suddenly, one participant shouts *'stop!'* and replaces Gabriela, the protagonist, and the following conversation unfolds:

"Why can't I sit on your lap anymore?"

—"Because I say so"

"But why?"

—"I am watching the game, why do you have so many questions?"

Together we are generating knowledge around growing up, about identifying as female or male, or as neither. What we are generating might be around 'gender', but it is much broader than that because it includes themes of family, loss, love, maturing, and violence, for example. The Joker asks the participant who replaced the protagonist: "What did you try to do when you replaced Gabriela?", she reflects: "I just wanted to ask why, I wanted to increase my status. I was caught between respecting my father and standing up for myself". Another participant, Anna, leans toward the participant next to her and whispers: "That struggle is just like society".

By experimenting and dealing with the consequences, we gained insight in what the father

might think, and how he might respond. Such a small scene, which came forth from exploring gestures, is never just what it is. It is much more, not unlike a metaphor for something much larger. The Joker remarks: “It seems the father is so uncomfortable with the situation that he doesn’t have *anything* to say”.

Again, we are digging in a little deeper. The Joker turns to the woman replacing the protagonist: “Well, let’s explore what you just said. Let’s get back to the scene, sit on his lap again. And see what is going on inside the fathers head”. The Joker turns to the participants: “Anybody, just stand behind him and be like a voice in his head, try to make a gesture and find a position where the voice is coming from”. One of the participants walks toward the father character and gently grabs the father by his throat and laments: “it’s not right, it doesn’t feel right, she’s not your wife, she’s your daughter”. The other participants one by one join in: “This used to be okay, but it’s not anymore, because she has boobs now. You can’t like this, you like this a little bit, don’t you?”, adds Adriana theatrically (see: “film-still two” on the next page). Another voice comes in: “You know it’s okay, but if someone else sees it, that person might see it differently”. All the different voices are coming from a different viewpoint, a different angle. All the viewpoint together create an extremely rich interpretation. The Joker asks again: “Do we recognise what is going on here, or is this just a weird old character?”, again: “Yes, most definitely!” The participants project their own ideas and share their own experiences. The intertwining of narratives is a fertile ground for the generating of knowledge.

“And what is the daughter feeling?”. Other participants join in and place voices around Gabriela. “We are all connected with these stories in different ways. I connect with this or that point of view”, remarks the Joker. Some voices and gestures are funny, some are more serious. “Are you okay?”, asks the Joker when Gabriela seems to be struggling with her emotions. “Yes, I’m good, it’s just... right on... please continue” says Gabriela. Different voices are added and now both Gabriela, playing a symbolisation of herself, and her father character have different voices around them, revealing the complexity of the situation. When the scene is finished she remarks: “I just needed to get through, I’m glad I continued doing the scene”. To close off, the Joker thanks everybody for being present, “Now, let’s come together in circle, so we can close off”. For me, time really flew by. I had a blast and I feel so alive and full of inspiration.

Film-still one: One of the participants (left) plays a voice that she thinks might be in Gabriela's head—by using her whole body. She whispers: 'It feels as if I'm invisible.'

Film-still two: Adriana (middle) plays a voice that she thinks might be the fathers'–and places it in the scene.

CHAPTER ONE

Foundations

> "Play is a uniquely adaptive act, not subordinate to some other adaptive act, but with a special function of its own in human experience."
>
> —Johan Huizinga

> "And I think that when people play a game—or reacts to an improvisation—it is an exercise in the here and now of these unique qualities that we all have: to create images, to interpret, to evaluate, to analyze."
>
> —Hector Aristizábal

The act of standing up and putting the chairs aside—as described in the vignette above—is, of course, to make room for the workshop that is to take place. At the same time this is a profoundly symbolic act. Sitting in a chair engages only certain parts of the body, and can be seen as a symbolization for the "separation of thought from action and of mind from body" (Ingold 2011:39). Getting rid of the chairs opens up possibilities of other modes of being and knowing. Play is important, to "help enable the de-mechanisation of the body and the mind", writes Augusto Boal (2006:5), the founding father of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" ("TO"). Play is essential for the human condition—although all too often neglected—because through play we externalise and share narratives, and—as I argue throughout this thesis—we generate knowledge. Boal calls theatre *"gnoseological"*, it is 'knowledge-enhancing' (Boal 1995:28). For Boal this is mostly knowledge about the self and the position of the individual, through a "doubling of the I" (*ibid*). This means that there is an 'I' that performs in ordinary life, and an 'I' that performs in the theatre setting. Both are inspired by each other and are—ultimately—inseparable.

This chapter is narrated through the four main collaborators. I will use literature to fill in blanks and to color in, but these books have—purposefully—not been my starting point; my approach is to gain some understand of the practice in Los Angeles, and not how it is 'supposed to be'. I will argue that TO—which I approach as a 'toolbox' of aesthetic and theatric techniques—is also

gnoseological in the sense that it collectively and democratically creates on-the-ground knowledge around a certain theme or topic, by creating a 'structure' in which the narratives we externalise and share are entangled. I am using 'generated', and not 'gathered' or 'acquired', since knowledge is not *a priori* but is 'located' in narratives and the interweaving thereof. The underlying notion of knowledge, which I already touched on above, is important for my approach. I have adopted the notion of knowledge used by Tim Ingold, that "knowledge is integrated not by fitting isolated particulars encountered here and there in categorical frameworks of ever wider generality, but by going around in an environment" (2011:160). This idea of "going around in an environment" is what Tim Ingold simply calls "wayfaring" (*ibid:*162). By going around, subjects encounter other subjects and get 'tangled up' in their narratives. Instead of seeing knowledge as something that is transferred, knowledge is generated by externalizing and sharing narratives. Thus, we "grow into knowledge" (*ibid*).

CORE PRINCIPLES

> "You can just teach the techniques, but I also like to teach the underlying principles. So that helps people to translate. […] And the minute you have the philosophy, [when] you are thinking about it, you are not only thinking about it when you do the work. [...] This is basically a way to live, and the work is going to illustrate that, it is an embodiment of that philosophy. And when you go home: keep it alive." (Schutzman 2012a)

The techniques that Boal developed together with a number of other practitioners—including Julian Boal, his son—are predicated on three core principles. These are clearly already present in his earlier work and the foundational book *"The Theatre of the Oppressed"*, but are later more systematised in the book *"The Rainbow of Desire"*, which appeared in 1995. Brent Blair was supremely articulate on these principles, as they justify and reify the use of existing—and the invention of new—techniques. Brent founded the master of Applied Theatre Arts at the University of Southern California (USC) and, logically, needs a clear understanding of what the work is about. The argumentation on the generating of knowledge, which will unfold throughout my thesis, is predicated on these core principles, and will go directly against a more modern, 'western' approach to knowledge.

Osmosis

The first principle is the principle of "osmosis". Boal was a chemist and part of the terminology he

used was inspired by the profession he had prior to the dedication of his life to theatre. Osmosis in chemistry is the process of equalizing the solute concentrations on two sides (Patlak 1999). It is an ongoing *process*, which is slow and steady, to equalise both sides. Boal used this analogy to understand the interplay between subjects and other subjects; for example, subjects and the state, for example. In the case of TO this means that the subject and its surroundings are interwoven and are mutually affected. There is a link between the individual, their personal world, and larger "structures"[18]. Important here is the notion that "all actions are political" (Boal 2000:ix), even to the extend that ignorance, naivety, not knowing and being uncritical (indirectly) means that a *status quo* is—in a way—re-produced. Mady Schutzman told me about her awakening to the world of activism, she reflected about her time growing up in the fifties and sixties:

> "These were the days of the 'personal is political', that is when that understanding started to run rampant. People were going like: 'Wow, how come *all* the women in this group-therapy session all saying the identical thing'. You know, why is it that we didn't all have the same families. This is a political issue, not a personal issue. I'm not responsible for this, it is not something I have to do to change myself in order to not be treated like this. But that there is a deep core, a cultural and social issue that is reinforcing it." (Schutzman 2012b)

The critical awareness of this interrelation is crucial, Mady reflected that at one point she suddenly realised: "this is the weft, the core texture [of society]" (2012b). Instead of seeing our narratives and our struggles as something deeply personal, by means of externalizing and sharing narratives it becomes clear that this is not just a personal issue but part of a bigger picture; the frame is also part of the picture. Knowledge, similarly, is not an individual endeavor, but a collective one. Brent Blair explained on this relation:

> "This story that I am experiencing, even though it seems personal, is reflected 'osmologically' in the culture. So I may tell you a story about my shame over being a minority, or being a racial minority, but somehow this story is political. It's exactly political. […] The personal and the political are connected and interrelated, so we must see them from that light, that we can never get lost in the precious story. In other words, your story is not just your story, because by virtue of all of us being in a room, we participate in that story too." (Blair 2012c)

An important aspect here is the notion of 'preciousness'. Each practitioner explains this in a

[18] In this thesis I avoid the terminology of "structure" and "agency" as they both collapse in the methodological approach through narratives, that I have set out above.

different way—or uses a different word—but central here is that a subject might hold an experience 'close'. Sometimes so close that it—almost literally—suffocates them. By exploring the theme, by using humor, whimsy and critical interrogation, it is externalised and other subjects also bear witness to the narratives. Thus, this not only makes it lighter, but makes explicit that other participants are part of the story too—just like in ordinary life. When it is external it can be shared, and thus becomes placed in a bigger context. What this points us towards is that so-called 'grand' or 'meta' narratives are told *through* the narratives a person shares. It is telling a story of, for example heteronormativity, *through* your personal story of being a gay person who goes around in the world and gets entwined in the narratives of other subjects. This understanding opens up the possibility to gain understanding of a certain context, a certain theme or topic, by exploring personal narratives, instead of focussing on some—rather arbitrary and polysemic—concept of '(gender) identity', for example.

To explain this further, it might be illustrative to include Judith Butler's notion of performativity, used by a number of TO-practitioners that I have encountered. First set out in *"Gender Trouble"*, published in 1990, Butler approaches gender as a performance that *produces* gender (instead of some *a priori* notion of sexuality that would precede gender). In the twenty years after Butler's initial work, she clarified and modified this notion slightly. In her 2009 article *"Performativity, precarity and sexual politics"* the relation between performativity—which is always a "negotiation of power" (Butler 2009:i)—on one hand, and precarious context on the other. Thus, for Butler, precarity "designates that politically induced condition in which certain populations suffer from failing social and economic networks of support and become differentially exposed to injury, violence, and death" (Butler 2009:ii). The performance of gender—either conforming or not—is interwoven with (exposure to) the precarious condition. In short, TO has the possibility to explore both of these aspect, precisely because they are interwoven. TO is remarkable in the sense that it ultimately starts with personal narratives and can start exploring from there.

Metaxis

Clearly inspired by Brecht, Boal recognises that theatre and ordinary life are never separate; they blend into one another. The is the principle of "metaxis", the "doubling of the I". Brent explains about this interrelation:

> "The actor, who stands up and performs his or her own life in the workshop, is occupying two worlds at the same time. They are occupying their own real world, their life experience, and they are also performing as Judith Butler says. It's a performativity of their lives. So they are both the actor and the real person. […] I can therefore take risks that I would ordinarily not be

able to take if I was just talking." (Blair 2012b)

Which means that, for Boal, there is both an "image of reality", as well as a "reality of the image" (Boal 1995:43). Interestingly, and Brent points towards the notion of performativity, is that that identity can be seen as mutable. There is not a fixed way of acting or responding. This aspect of shifting performance makes it possible to experiment through theatre, by 'trying' different performances and learning about the responses, about the consequences. By embodying different aspects, different stories, a possibility opens up to play with it in an aesthetic space, which is often—even though it is thrilling to participate—a safer space than ordinary life. What we imagine in theatre has real consequences, because we take the experience along in ordinary life. Moreover, the narratives that are externalised and shared are inspired by ordinary life. They are never mere fiction. To conclude, theatre can be seen as a "rehearsal for life" (Boal 2006:6).

Analogical induction

The third principle is the principle of "analogical induction". One element that is different from ordinary theatre—or drama-therapy for that matter—is the idea behind this aspect of replacement, of interchangeability. Important in TO is that participants play different roles. It is about:

> "The fact [that] the techniques we rely upon no one actor ever playing the same role. The idea is replacement, to shift. The protagonist plays the antagonist, and the antagonist plays somebody else. And in that is a basic core belief of Boal's system, is that you don't identify with any one character, not an actor or spect-actor." (Schutzman 2012a)

By playing different characters and roles one is embodying different narratives. Even though they are extremely fragmented, integral is the acknowledgements of the complexity of the story. This interchangeability is justified by this notion of analogical induction, meaning when one embodies a different narrative,

> "They don't have to have shared the same story, to be able to get up and also intervene. Why? Well, because by analogy I am inducted into that story, I can jump into those stories even if I don't know that story for myself. By analogy this story touches on grief, even I never lost my mother, but I have lost others. And I understand it by analogy, and therefore I belong in the room. That's why Boal justifies people who's story is not the same coming up and replace a person." (Blair 2012b)

This principle is fundamental, because it gives us insight in a central element of the workshops: the replacing of participants with each other, on participants acting out—and inquiring, mocking and questioning—the narratives of other participants. However, a bottleneck is the idea of proximity, which contends that not all practitioners accept white males playing woman of color, for example. Brent has a strong postcolonial sensitivity which expresses in this idea of proximity, what he calls "praxis of proximity", which "declares that the more proximate you are to the source material of the story, the closer the story is to you, the more authentic your voice becomes. Which doesn't mean that anybody can't participate, but it just means that we should be mindful about our distance or closeness to that story" (Blair 2012c). There is no black-and-white division between having either an either authentic or inauthentic voice, as I will elaborate on below in "Chapter Three: The Joker". The role of a practitioner is to instigate a process of questioning and critical interrogation, and the more proximate a story is, the more informed the questions will be. At the same time this does not mean that a participant that has a certain distance to the narratives of other participants will, by definition, not be able to ask critical questions. All in all, it means that there is an impact of the position and role of the Joker during the process of generating knowledge.

ROUNDING UP

To gain an understanding of how TO instigates the generation of knowledge on a certain theme or topic, an emphasis is put on the genesis, change over time, present conditions, and context. In the Prologue I elaborated on the genesis of TO. To understand how TO-techniques incite the generating of knowledge, I have set out three core principles that underlie and justify TO-techniques: "osmosis", "metaxis", and "analogical induction". I have shown that these core principles are crucial to the generating of knowledge, because by externalizing and sharing stories, the mutual influence of the "image of reality" and the "reality of the image", and by inducing into another participants' narratives, these narratives get thoroughly intermeshed. A 'personal' narrative is never *strictly* personal—though it might be experienced as such in the first instance—but flow out and through, and permeates, the subject.

CHAPTER TWO

Shattering the singular

> "It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. […] How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. […] Power is the ability not just to tell the story of another person, but to make it the definitive story of that person." (Adichie 2009)

> "I've found theater can be that lightning as it's an art that engages the whole person. While rich with ideas, it works through the actor's body with movement and rhythm, and incorporates images, emotions and words. The stage provides a safe container for the release of memory and feeling." (Aristizábal and Lefer 2010:227)

> "The wonderful thing about theatre is that we can look at the scenes and look at the consequences of these acts. And no one gets hurts, no one gets killed. These are actors, using theatre to generate dialogue, not to condemn. […] This is to create more questions, to create dialogue, not to give answers."
>
> —Hector Aristizábal

In the vignette above there was the example of Gabriela, acting out a memory of her childhood. We re-enacted a little fragment of a narrative and initiated a process of inquiring and questioning. This process was relatively short during this particular workshop, and sometimes this process takes much longer. A monological approach to the narrative will focus on Gabriela; that the girl has become a woman, through a sort of *'rites de passage'*. This might include norms of physical contact between parents and children. If we keep this narrative 'simple', it will remain one-sided. For Gabriela, this was her first experience of gender-identification and this knowledge is embedded in this narrative. By dissecting the scene, and by recognizing the complexity, knowledge is generated on many more aspects than just the daughter and her position. In the "Theatre of the Oppressed" ("TO"), all the subjects are interrogated, including the father and his motives. What made the father make that decision at that certain point? By asking questions we opened up this narrative. And by collectively

projecting ideas and questioning the scene, the narrative grows richer and richer. Instead of focusing on one aspect, we inquired about the daughter and the father, about the event and about the broader context. TO invites a democratic space where the exchange of ideas and inspiration are encouraged. The space is democratic in the sense that it evokes and relies on both individuals and the collective creativity (Cohen-Cruz 2010:43). The point of entry is always a narrative that a participant shares—the event in itself—and through the exploration we move collectively and democratically towards a more general theme or topic.

In the previous parts I have set out how, incited by the Joker, narratives get entwined in a TO-workshop. Moreover, the narratives we externalise and share are sometimes seen as having a certain inherent 'truth', instead of having a rather tentative nature. In this chapter I will elaborate on three crucial elements of TO that perpetuate the boundaries of a singular narrative. I approach these elements by focussing on the notion of "polyphony" (literally: "multi-voicedness"), coined by Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975). Bakhtin was a Russian philosopher, literary critic, semiotician and scholar who worked on literary theory, ethics, and the philosophy of language. Bakhtin was one of the first scholars to refuse ontological hermeneutics, which was a dangerous approach at the time. For Bakhtin, "we can locate meaning in the dialogic process of interaction between speaking subjects, between texts and readers, [and] between texts themselves" (Lodge 1990:86). This is similar to what renowned postmodernist and deconstructionist thinker Jacques Derrida remarked: *"il n'y a pas de hors-texte"* (1997:163); "there is nothing outside the text". A rough explanation is that the interpretation of the 'text' is ascribed a in the context, and is not intrinsic to the text itself.

Especially dangerous was the recognition of a multiplicity of 'truths'—whether this be the "relativism of truth, or truth of the relative" (Sokal and Bricmont 1998:159). Bakhtin sought, in Russia, an alternative approach to the authoritarian regime. This search seems analogical to Augusto Boal's search of a democratic space in Brazil, which he found in theatre. What Bakhtin writes on the 'modern west', is that there is an extremely pervasive notion—a "sticky engagement"—that resembles the following:

> "True judgments are not attached to a personality, but correspond to some unified, systemically monologic context. Only error individualises. Everything that is true finds a place for itself within the boundaries of a single consciousness, and if it does not actually find for itself such a place, this is so for reasons incidental and extraneous to the truth itself. In the ideal a single consciousness and a single mouth are absolutely sufficient for maximally full cognition; there is no need for a multitude of consciousnesses, and no basis for it." (1999:81)

This pervasive notion of 'truth' refuses—or at least refutes—dialogues, by nature. This monological consciousness is ideologically vulgar because it leaves no room for questioning, only "individual error". Bakhtin worked a great deal of his time analyzating polyphonic novels, in which he recognises the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821 - 1881) as the first author to use this approach. He explains:

> "It is constructed not as the whole of a single consciousness, absorbing other consciousnesses as objects into itself, but as a whole formed by the interaction of several consciousnesses, none of which entirely becomes an object for the other; this interaction provides no support for the viewer who would objectify an entire event according to some ordinary monologic category (thematically, lyrically or cognitive1y)—and this consequently makes the viewer also a participant." (*ibid*:18)

I will extend this notion of polyphony to the TO-workshops. Everyone is interrogated in a TO-setting, both the protagonist and antagonist, as well as everybody and everything else that comes up. Thus, a monological approach is pried open. Moreover, this polyphony is found both *between* and *within* subjects. First of all, I will elaborate on the friction of the body and the mind; there is not a singular narrative *within* the subject itself. Second, by recognizing this complexity we see that the tendency of "emplotment" is revealed and questioned. We can look at the fragments and the narratives and see them for what they are: complex, contradictory, and incoherent. Third, by responding to the actual context, and not in a dogmatic way, we recognise what is actually in front of us, instead of an internalised 'idea' of what could be there. These three elements together influence the generating of knowledge, by refusing the singular narrative through the process of revealing the polyphonic nature of the narratives—both inside and outside of the TO-setting.

SELF-CONTRADICTION OF THE BODY

> "The work is powerful and uncomfortable."
>
> —Barbara-June Dodge

I would like to extend Bakhtin's notion of polyphony. By taking an approach through narratives we see that each subject embodies a multiplicity of different narratives—including their (ideological) viewpoints—which ultimately can result in a dialogical interaction *within* the subject itself. Instead

of focusing on some 'truth' of a narrative, we can accept its complexity and contradictory aspects. The body in TO is important because narratives are embodied. In the process of externalizing, sharing, and playing out, the body becomes a vessel for exploring stories. Narratives are performed visually, kinesthetically, through sound, movement, and abstract terms, or through metaphors. Important is that there are often contradictory aspects between these 'modes of embodiment'—which is shown through our performances in everyday life, as well as in TO. It bring them from 'out there' to 'in here'. As Mady Schutzman explained on the importance of embodiment:

> "When people are talking they censor themselves. […] They don't want to—sometimes for good reasons—engage in racist speech or sexist speech. […] When you get up on your feet then you are busy and you are doing things and you come in—sort of move in—to a more instinctual, emotion-based, less intellectually critical, space. And that makes explicit the more implicit—and internalised—dynamics." (Schutzman 2012b)

Mady continued, explaining: "Because your body will then perform things that your mind will tell you never to show. And in play—in embodied play—people reveal much more complex and more contradictory aspects. And by making those visible, they can be worked on". One of the many examples Mady gave is on racism: "If you ask people: 'Are you a racist?', they will say: 'Well, no, I don't identify as one'. But then you start playing, you do a scene, and then you see racist behavior". In TO this becomes apparent, but it requires the attention and critical interrogation of the Joker:

> "[When] you are doing a scene and somehow somebody makes some kind of comment, or is intervening in a scene, and doesn't pay attention—doesn't give the same attention—to people of color in the scene. Or, even when you are selecting people to be in your scene, you choose your white friends. […] What is it that makes for those choices? Why is it that you can't cast your scene beyond racial markers?" (Schutzman 2012b)

The re-production of performative gender and racial inequalities, for example, is mostly unconscious. Key to getting singular narratives to open up is knowing where to look, and knowing what to question. By seeing singular narratives as narratives with a certain genesis in a certain context, the "emplotment" of the narratives can be questioned. Which means, for Gabriela in the vignette: Who makes the decision to change the event? Where does this idea of a normative daughter-father relation come from? Moreover, contrary to the contradictory aspect of embodied

play is, for example, the expectation of a 'truth' of gender. This not only neglects the vastness of ordinary life experience, but also creates 'false' gender identifications, and creates norms—as in the notion of gender performativity of Butler points us towards. Such a *cul-de-sac* view of the 'truth' of gender inhibits and produces a restricted—and restricting—world-view. It sees those beings living *in* and *on* the world through the separation of the body and mind, of human and nature. This fosters an approach to humanity as understandable, 'simple', and as individuals being (almost literally) disembodied.

Another important point that came forth in the vignette is that each time an image is made, it evokes an endless stream of interpretations. My argument would be that it is 'easy' to stick with concepts and theories, which are much safer than actually participating in, and actually engaging with, narratives. It is tremendously uncomfortable to embody narratives—both 'your own' and somebody else's. For myself, familiar with acting and directing, it was at first uncomfortable to 'give myself away' and to embody other narratives ('What if I discredit or unintentionally mock that person?').

Nevertheless, discomfort can be a confrontation with whatever you have internalised as belonging to you: "the discomfort can come from—I think—identifying with, resonating with. Not realizing that it would be something you would resonate with. These sort of sneak attacks of your own history, that happens when you are engaged in the work" (Dodge 2012a). Embodying narratives can evoke different responses, and even seeing someone else embody 'your' narrative can be a profound experience because the external might trigger something internal, which is obvious considering the emotional responses throughout the workshops.

RECOGNISING THE COMPLEXITY

> "I can create an image that feels to me like an experience with my father, and people can see a dictator in it, or a drill sergeant, a despot, or can see a two year old imposing her will in the adult. We can see many things."
>
> —Hector Aristizábal

> "All of it was really whimsical. The point comes across so much better sometimes when you don't get hit in the head with it."
>
> —anonymous participant

My argumentation in this thesis runs directly against a modern sense of science, one in which knowledge is unambiguous and can the transmitted. I became very much aware of this 'confusion of the map with the terrain'. Polyphony is not something that needs to be done, it is already there. It needs to be *recognised*. In the vignette we see that the voices of the father are already there. It is about interrogating the daughter and the father, the context, the memories, the past, the desires, the internalised gender-norms, et cetera. I have posed that TO can be used to generate knowledge, through the process of *poiēsis*—of bringing forth meaning—instead of 'disclosing' some concepts both spatially and temporally detached from the context. I recall Brent talking about poets. At first I had no clue what to make of it, when he told me that, when doing TO, you need a poet by your side. It took a while before I figured out the profound implications for the role of the practitioner when interrogating a scene:

> "A poet looks at a tree and says: 'Here is the earth wrapping [the] whole of a branch, and clutching, lest it fall into the sky', right? That is how poets see a tree. […] So instead of 'here is a tree, here is a thing, here is a kid in lock-up, here is a teacher and a student', [we start to see] what this story is symbolically and poetically, and what we are talking about here. [It is] really big. This is not just a parole officer. This is not a parole officer, and a parolee, this is all of humanity and the state, terrified, clinging on to what it doesn't know, in order to colonise it." (Blair 2012c)

This points us towards the idea that if we are directly looking at an event with a singular set of identity concepts in the back of our minds, we only get a view of the map, not the terrain. With TO, "you awaken in you all kinds of material that you didn't think was even relevant. [By taking] very circuitous paths, indirect paths, you really make your understanding of the situation much more complex" (Schutzman 2012b). This means acknowledging that the view changes from where you are standing. However, you only notice this when you are responding in the context itself, as I will show in the next paragraph. This happens by confronting the reality of other narratives, as they are embodied by different participants—including their consequences—as well as through the interrogation of the interweaving of narratives. Alienation, intentional complexity, humor and mockery all work in tandem in the dialogues and dialectics of processes of externalizing, sharing, embodying, et cetera. The event is approached in such a way, as already complex, that it becomes impossible to objectify it. Bakhtin focuses mainly on "manifestations in literary art" (1999:82); however, an underlying notion—which is never made fully explicit in his work—is the polyphonic nature of *all* human interactions. Though this is often not recognised as such, as the process of coherency and definitiveness is one where I position the role of dynamics of power. As Brent

continued on the role of poetry:

> "What does poetry do? It makes, *poiēsis*. And that means it makes meaning out of what for some might be meaningless. It makes important what people think is very unimportant. If you think of a haiku, it brings the entire world into a drop of water. Or a butterfly. Or that native grass. It's like very small. This is poetry. And so anti-poetry does the opposite. It takes [things] that are meaningful, and reduces them, it objectifies them, and makes them meaningless." (Blair 2012)

Inherent in this is a view of human beings as complex, as contradictory, as ever-changing, and as as makers of meaning. As humans are continuously becoming, so is our world; they are inseparable, because the "world never ceases its worlding" (Ingold 2011:226). So again and again we need to engage with narratives. Mady remarked that: "Don't make it more complex if it isn't. But if it is more complex, don't reduce it. Don't just make it complex for the hell of it. But recognise how complex it is" (Schutzman 2012b). Moreover, as will become clear below, with the example of Joe Goode, complexity is recognizing the diversity of the participants, including their backgrounds and "obituated performances":

> "Most plays will go to other contexts. And for me its very interesting to see if a man replaces a woman. I can use that in the dialogue. Because we would see, for example, that when most men come to intervene in a scene of domestic violence, they intervene violently. Because they are usually bigger than the abuser. We would ask: 'Is that possible?' Yes, if the woman is on steroids, or if the woman learns Kung fu. But the underlying message that we are telling the women is that 'you are stupid and weak, you should be strong and fight'. So it's a teaching moment. It's not a right or wrong thing." (Aristizábal 2012b)

Such interaction opens up the possibility to talk about these underlying messages, and by asking "Would this be possible?" we start to move away from a fixed position. We see what would happen within a certain context, by playing it out, instead of talking about it, because it is always separate from the context. What happens in TO is that before finding a solution, there is a time of talking in riddles, a time of exploring the images and the narratives, as well as the underlying messages and principles. It is a process of defeating dogmas and intuiting by experimentation, and this is both the case for participants and practitioners.

RESPONSIVITY

> "We were performing in Amman. We were doing a piece called "Take Place". It was about the loss of a lover to Aids. The piece had a mount of dirt out in the audience, in the aisle. And I would shovel this dirt as if I were burying someone. And there was a song, almost like a keening, sad song. So there I am out in the audience, with the public of all these men in their native dress. And they started making these horrible guttural sounds. It started in one little sector and soon it was in the whole audience. And I thought they were going to beat me up. I got really scared, because I didn't understand. And then I suddenly began to discern that what they were saying was: *'Allah! Allah! Allah!'* Because so many of them had buried sons and daughters and mothers and fathers and lovers, and they were *weeping*. They were responding to what they were seeing and what they were feeling. But they weren't thinking about a gay man burying a lover."
>
> —Joe Goode

The response of the spectators, in the example above, raises the question of expectations and of actual responses. Moreover, it implicitly questions ontological hermeneutics, of any 'truth' of a text—or, in this case, a performance. I remember sitting on the terrace of the "Home Made" café in Berkeley with Joe Goode, a choreographer and dancer who is based in the Bay Area, and is the director and initiator of the "Joe Goode Performance Group" ("JGPG"). He told me about his personal experience of internalizing expectations and norms to such an extend that a person feels like they have to disown themselves to make it in the world. Joe felt he had to trim his gender performance back, because he got beaten up as a child. It took him years to re-discover what felt best for him, what was his "inherent nature". I see a joyful, flamboyant gay man in front of me, so I imagined it worked out for the better for Joe.

A performance, whether it is a 'real' theatre play, a performance in ordinary life, or a performance during a TO-workshop, can be fixed or dogmatic—instead of responding to that which is offered in the actual context. Important is questioning what you are seeing and how you respond to it. In a TO-workshop this is apparent too, as Mady remarked: "a lot of the time people come up with solutions that are so reactive and not complicated and a-critical, and not very thoughtful" (Schutzman 2012c). The responses from other participants can be dogmatic in the sense that they respond from a certain fixed position, as they have "internalised so many things" (*ibid*). TO explores narratives by taking "circuitous paths". The participants respond to what "they are seeing and what they are feeling" (Goode 2012a), thus, the 'truth' of the piece is lost—simply because there isn't any to begin with. As Joe remarked: "Even though we would give a translation—a

written translation—they still re-contextualise it to their own needs" (*ibid*). Brent is extremely articulate in the destructive aspects of fixed ways of responding. By growing up in Texas it seems he has had his fair share of dogmas. In the interviews we talked about these internalizations and the process of overcoming them:

> "The world I came from is the world of Texas. Republican, born again and baptist Christian, colonizing, white, heterosexual, heteronormative. […] That world was so full of narratives, and so full of constructs, that were so big, that I thought that was the world; I thought that the constructs were the world. And then we moved overseas, and I saw Malaysia, another culture. And either that culture was fake, and they were all going to hell. Or the old culture was fake, and then everything is *bullshit*." (Blair 2012d)

For Brent it was the confrontation of a completely different culture—a different set of narratives—that reinforced the questioning of his own inarticulate background. By immersing himself in Malaysian culture, he couldn't uphold the 'truth' of the "world of Texas". Brent explained about the rigid responses that he was used to, when he lived in Texas: "What is dogmatic is for me to say: 'I am a man, and you are a pussy, because you are not man *enough'*. To believe in Christ is not in itself dogmatic. To say 'I love religion' or 'I love Christianity' is not dogmatic. But saying: '*my* Jesus is saying *you* are going to hell', that becomes a problem" (Blair 2012c). The point here is that often a singular narrative is so taken for granted that behaviors—our ordinary life performances, which Mady Schutzman aptly called an "obituated performance"—are so fixed that we are blind to whatever is offered. One question we might ask is "How are these characters engaged in a mandated performance of a certain kind of expectation—[a certain kind] of safety?" (Schutzman 2012b) and "Why do they keep performing even though they know it's hurting others? Why is the risk too great?" (*ibid*). What happens is that:

> "Even if somebody is coming with a kindness, with an offer, my reaction might be '*fuck* you'. Well, it makes sense. It's a pathology in the sense that it's full of suffering, *pathos*, so I have a pathological response. […] Liberation is the process of restoring responsivity. Restoring one's ability to adapt, to flex, to respond, to cope, to manage. So that we can launch a responsible, appropriate strategy against oppression. Without it being a gut-level reaction. As it doesn't necessarily liberate us to stay with anger. Anything that is fixed is like a shackle." (Blair 2012c)

I will extend this notion of 'responsivity' to the role of the anthropologist in "Chapter Four:

Opening up". For now it is important to point out the implicit underlying notion: by adopting a responsive posture, it becomes a process of reclaiming the courage of making mistakes and going down swinging. This posture is incited by the Joker, through externalization and sharing. In the "Vignette" we saw earlier, the Joker gave impossible instructions, forcing participants to make mistakes. Brent remarked that "TO is built on mistakes. TO is founded on these things". The process of undermining common sense, dogmas and intuition can be done by on-the-ground experimenting, and by making mistakes. Responding to the surroundings is what Tim Ingold calls "being sentient" (Ingold 2011:12). It is "to open up to a world, to yield to its embrace, and to resonate in one's inner being to its illuminations and reverberations. Bathed in light, submerged in sound and rapt in feeling, the sentient body, at once both perceiver and producer, traces the paths of the world's becoming in the very course of contributing to its ongoing renewal" (*ibid*).

Another important element is humor. Using humor, mockery and whimsy, a fixed position does not work anymore. Mady works explicitly with the "clowning aspect" of TO. What happens is that "you can externalise it, make it an external thing, remove it from yourself, and turn it into a cartoon. That's what clowning does. And making light" (Schutzman 2012a). The externalization allows the ability to play with the narrative. And Mady continued: "If you can take something serious to you—so take an internal thing—and give it an external expression. And then have other people act it out, and [have] yourself look at it. And lovingly exaggerate it. Then maybe you can play with it, and in a way critique it, laugh at it yourself" (*ibid*). At the same time, it is still a *serious* endeavor, as Barbara-June remarked: "But inside of that cartoon, inside of the circus of it, is rage. *Rage.* At racism, and who they are".

ROUNDING UP

Each subject has multiple ways of encountering the world—including their interpretation and understanding of it—and the narratives and performances of others. Recognition of the complexity of narratives is important, as well as the entwinement of narratives, because "no utterance stands absolutely alone, […] every utterance must be understood in relation to that which provoked it, and shapes itself in anticipation of a future response" (Lodge 1990:86). Instead of responding in a fixed, rather dogmatic way, the participants of a TO-workshop respond to whatever is handed to them by other participants and the practitioners. Responding to the context, "being sentient", is foundational for an on-the-ground and in-the-context production of knowledge; they break open singular narratives by approaching them from different angles as they are externalised. Complexity and contradiction is not something that reflects a certain 'falseness', but can be seen as a "genuine chaos" (Bakhtin 1999:xiii) that is inherent in the human condition. TO reveals the polyphonic

nature of narratives because “a variety of conflicting ideological positions are given a voice and set in play both *between* and *within* individual speaking subjects, without being placed and judged by an authoritative authorial voice” (Lodge 1990:86; emphasis added). Thus, the narrative *guides the interaction*.

INTERMEZZO

> "What I felt is that, for me, one of the things that Boal gave me was permission to, is to use the techniques and develop them according to the needs of the groups that I work with. And I also feel that when I really learn something—any methodology or theory—is when I appropriate the theory, when I embody the theory according to my own experience, my own interest."
>
> —Hector Aristizábal

I learned throughout my ethnographic fieldwork that the techniques of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" ("TO") are inseparable from the ethics, philosophy and theory that serves as a strong foundation for the techniques. These core principles seems to be perpetuating throughout all—or at least most—of the techniques, as justification and reinforcement. However, there is no real interchangeable 'toolbox' with a set of tools which are immutable and solid. My research collaborators, even though they may have done dozens of workshops together during the time of "CTO ATA L.A.", are talking about the core principles and techniques very differently. Each of the practitioners stress different approaches, different ideas and different techniques, which are important for them. All the tools are personalised and adapted to the needs of the practitioners and the communities they work with, and hybrid forms and new techniques are invented (sometimes even on the spot). The background of the practitioner influences their critical interrogation of the narratives that are externalised and shared in the context of the TO-workshops. Every practitioner brings their own experience and incorporates it into the work, and in different contexts there are blossoming different forms of TO.

To illustrate the diversity of the experience each practitioner brings to the work, I will elaborate on the—rather fragmented—narrative of Hector. In the months of my ethnographic fieldwork, I followed Hector and his partner Alessia to many places. Los Angeles is a vast city, and often I would spend a long duration on the backseat of their car, roaming the seemingly endless asphalt labyrinth. I had the opportunity to ask many questions. Over time, the car became a vessel for the many, many stories we shared. Hector told me about growing up in Medellín, Colombia, and about his many positive experiences there, as well as his experiences with violence, which

perpetuate all throughout his childhood and adolescence. Because of this, he eventually—forcefully—exchanged Colombia for the United States. During one of those 'backseat-days' Hector told me about starting with theatre:

> "I started doing theatre in Colombia when I was in high school. […] We created a small group and we became the theatre group from the college and it gave a lot of freedom to go to other places. […] So we were all revolutionaries. We were all doing plays against the government, and against the *gringo* Yankees, against the church, and the *instituto*—against the linguistic institute that used to 'sterilise' tribes in the Amazon. So we read things and then write a play about it and put it together. But we didn't have a lot of techniques. […] As soon as I finished high school I continued. I entered the university and I came together with two other people that I had met in the process, and we created a group called "La Mojiganga". *Mojiganga* is an expression of popular theatre in Colombia that evolved from the *actos sacramentales*, the plays that the religious missionaries used to teach the bible and Christianity to the indigenous people, and the indigenous people took those forms and transformed them. So it was very playful and very symbolic, it used music and the body. So that started my interest in the body as the main instrument to tell stories. […] And at the same time I continued studying psychology and as student of psychology I became very interested in psychodrama. So I started training with some Argentinian psycho-dramatists who were in Medellín. I started using theatre, using the possibility to embody what you are talking about, not just do it through talk-therapy. Even though my theoretical training was mostly psychoanalytic, Lacanian."

The traffic was very slow and he opened up his window, stretching his arms, and started washing his face with the fresh raindrops. He told me how it reminded him of the earlier times of being in Los Angeles, filled with anger and sadness as he would drive in his car to find some peace of mind—often in vain. It seems Hector has found a way of dealing with his experiences, even though I can hear the tone of his voice change, depending on the subject of the conversation. He continued to talk about the conditions in Colombia, and the time he moved to the United States. At one point I remember Hector stressing—during a previous workshop—the importance of imagination in the work. I asked him if he could explain this, and he picked up:

> "So [when I came to Los Angeles] we had a group called "Tajere Performance Collective", and I directed probably around twenty original plays that we did with gang-members, immigrant groups, people with Aids and HIV, we did many many plays with them, with that

> community. And sometimes I would invite people to participate in the process—the people that were my clients as a therapists—because I worked a lot with young kids who were involved in gangs, who had problems with violence. I found that: yes, talking with them is important, and talking to their parents is important, and working with the teachers. But what was most important for me was to offer them an opportunity to see themselves in a different light, a different way. Because for me, as a young person, we were always in poverty. Imagination was what allowed me to survive, to not get involved with the groups—many of my friends became Guerilla fighters, and then other kids I played soccer with became Paramilitary Deathsquads. That is the complete opposite point of view. And it became very dangerous for me too. Most of them just became drug-dealers and were killed, so I saw an entire generation of kids and young people die around me. […] But then I found theatre as the place were I could invite the conversation rather than go on and kill people."

Eventually, in 2000, Hector founded "ImaginAction", an organization dedicated to "community healing and social justice"[19]. Imagination for Hector is a spark for action, and he would often say during the workshops: "imagination is the most basic human right". It allowed him to imagine a world beyond Colombia's military dictatorship, and now he is creating a space were narratives are embodied; through imagination the participants imagine a different world. The emphasis on play and the celebration of life is omnipresent in the workshops Hector is doing.

* * *

During another one of those 'backseat-days' we were driving back from the "Healing Club" at the "Program for Torture Victims", a community program to facilitate the healing process after experiencing torture. Hector would carry his djembé to each TO-workshop and brought it along this time too. As we closed the workshop by gathering in a circle, he invented a story on the spot, inspired by Native American or an African tradition. I remember one of the participants—who was present with her mother, a torture survivor—shared: "I haven't seen my mother smile in three years". After the "Healing Club" we drove to Pasadena to another workshop, and we talked about bringing his own experience to the work.

> "But I think sometimes disclosure of your own experiences is important with certain groups. I also don't think that in order to work with torture survivor you need to be a torture survivor

[19] http://www.imaginaction.org

> yourself, or in order to work with alcoholics you have to be an alcoholic, or in order to work with rape victims you have to be raped. I think it gives you certain experiences, but it doesn't necessarily give you knowledge. Some people can be raped but they cannot work with rape victims. They cannot even deal with their own experience. And a lot of the torture survivors I have met sometimes cannot even talk about their own experiences, let alone offer a healing environment for torture survivors. Yet I think by healing ourselves, by healing our wounds, we are gaining tools that we can share with others. I don't tell people: 'in order to heal your wound of torture you have to do what I did'. You know, I don't. But people can find inspiration, or people can find things that I have done appalling. Some people hear me, or know that I am doing a play about torture, and they cannot even fathom it, like: 'what the hell is this guy doing?' Other people feel inspired after seeing it. For other people—I hope not, but it could be—it is re-wounding. […] And of course when I do my play about my own experience with my torture and the killing of my brother, it triggers other wounds in other people. Because for people it can be slavery, it can be human trafficking, it can be rape, it can be domestic violence, that is triggered. I mean I had met women who had been tortured for years by their husbands. Or men and women who had been tortured by their mothers or their fathers for years. And I mean torture not just physically, but emotionally. So it's not just state-sponsored torture. I am very lucky that now, after doing lots of years of therapy and many other things, I can share this."

I remember Barbara-June Dodge, a long-time colleague and friend of Hector, telling me: "Hector is a wounded healer", and she continued: "In the Jewish tradition there is the idea of a 'sin-eater'. Someone who sits with the body, and ingests [sins]". Hector's experiences—and the continuing effort of processing them—allow him to hold the space for a lot of emotions. With curiosity, honesty, playfulness and whimsy he leads many workshops. The experience of growing up in Colombia strongly influences his work. It not only invigorated his critique on United States foreign policy, it also gave him knowledge on politics that influence the questions Hector asks during workshops, and thus influences the depth of the dig. What I am aiming at is that the proximity of Hector's narrative to those of participants—and the proximity between the participants' narratives—influences the knowledge that is generated. It is not a process of disclosing some *a priori* form of knowledge—or some 'transcendental' form of universal knowledge—about a theme or topic. Hector's experiences, as well as the narratives of the participants, are contextual. In other words, the process of *poiēsis*, of creating meaning, is strongly contextual.

CHAPTER THREE

The Joker

> "Hopefully we are not there to convince anyone else to believe or to feel or to think the way we do. […] Not even with my children, I don't want my children to be like me. I don't want them to believe what I believe. I want to share my process with them. Even with myself I hope that I continue changing. I haven't found the truth about anything, especially about myself."
>
> —Hector Aristizábal

> "You got to look at yourself. You got to get up there and see whether you are a racist yourself."
>
> —Mady Schutzman

> "It is very difficult to see one's own most cherished ideas in perspective." (Feyerabend 2010:227)

Jokers are crucial to the advancement and development of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" ("TO"). They carry the 'toolbox' and embody the ethics, philosophy and theory of the work. Moreover, they work with the communities and travel to conferences—locally and abroad—to spread the ideas and techniques, and to gather information and soak up inspiration. In the "Intermezzo" above I have shown what a Joker might bring to a workshop, by focusing on the process of how Hector Aristizábal started using TO (and similar techniques) and what he brings to the workshops. Disposition, experience and mood of the Joker on the one hand, and the needs of the communities on the other hand, influence how a Joker works, and which questions he or she asks in the process—and, ultimately, affect the knowledge that is generated. The generation of knowledge is not (only) done by finding answers and solutions to existing problems, but by asking new questions. This questioning is, as will become clear throughout this chapter, strongly influenced by the positionality of the Joker.

Throughout the many conversations I had with Brent Blair he would regularly interrupt the

conversation to elaborate on the etymology of a word. At one point I used the word "facilitator"—commonly used by Freirean pedagogy—and he objected: "the word 'facilitator' comes from the French word *'facile'*, which means 'to make easy', the role of the Joker is to make difficult, not to make easy" (Blair 2012b). In "Chapter One: Foundations" and "Chapter Two: Shattering the singular" I have elaborated on the core principles underlying TO and shown the importance of prying open the singularity of narratives. Personal experience and everyday life performance perpetuates beyond the boundaries of conceptual and a-contextual knowledge. In this chapter I will focus on TO through the lens of the "fusion of horizons", coined by German philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900 - 2002). In this light, I approach TO as the creation of a 'structure' to acknowledge the horizons and perspectives each subject has, and from there creates new standards of judgment. I will elaborate on the role of the Joker—and the difficulties involved with it—for sharing narratives and shattering the singular narrative. What is the balancing act of the Joker? How do Jokers work to navigate the hall of mirrors, the moment a singular narrative breaks? I will elaborate on the notion of the "fusion of horizons" before continuing with the balancing act of the Joker.

BROADEN THE HORIZONS

> "This does not mean that we must have the same opinions but that we find a ground for the exchange of our different views on reality." (Gadamer 1982:10)

Gadamer refers to 'a horizon' as "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point" (Gadamer 2004:301), and continues: "applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth" (*ibid*). Gadamer's most acclaimed work is *"Truth and Method"*, which was first published in 1960, and largely revised in 1975[20]. The critique that runs through *"Truth and Method"* is twofold: first is the tendency of the humanities to model their methods on the natural sciences, and second is the tendency towards recovering the 'original' intention of the author, when interpreting texts. Gadamer refuses ontological hermeneutics by the same token as Bakhtin's notion of "polyphony", described in "Chapter Two: Shattering the singular" above.

Gadamer's notion of "fusion of horizons" follows the idea of perspectivism by Friedrich Nietzsche and Edmund Husserl. It is about acknowledging that our view changes from where we

[20] This is—not without coincidence—roughly the same time the first edition of "Against Method" by late Paul Feyerabend was published.

are standing, and that we can only see part of 'reality'. Hermeneutics, in my view, comes from our narrative understanding of the world. We judge and value *through* the narratives (and their ideologies) we embody. Thus, interpretation and understanding—and in the end knowledge itself—does not come from some *a priori* given—as each and every person, and each and every culture, is an interwoven hive of different narratives—but from the confrontation of other horizons (and their reality), without such an ideology or narrative becoming the object of other subjects, as I have criticised in "Chapter Two: Shattering the singular". However, not all narratives are experienced with equal value. One narrative might be told more often, or get a foothold where others do not. They are, *inherently*, equal.

The 'structure' TO creates during the workshops emphasises that everyone, regardless of sex, gender identification or sexual orientation, could share a stories about being a man or woman, or moments when they felt they are neither. An approach which focuses on concepts would not fathom asking a man how what it is like to be a woman. In the "Introduction" I wrote the story about questioning high heels as being solely a symbol of oppression; Steve Susoyev told the complete opposite story (*'These make me feel so powerful!'*) The premise of TO is to:

> "Move away from the certitudes that operate within the gesture that the knowing, judging, willing subjects always already knows what is good for everybody, ahead of any investigation. The investigation, in turn, must be possessed of an openness so radical that I can express it only in Heideggerian terms: the capacity to hear that which one does not already understand." (Chakrabarty 2002:36)

The "radical openness" is to externalise, share, embody and play out different narratives and their (ideological) viewpoints. What follows is a fusion of horizons incited by the Joker, it can be 'Jokered through'. However, there are challenges for the Joker, which I will elaborate on below. For Gadamer, hermeneutics is in the "polarity of familiarity and strangeness" (Gadamer 2004:295), in this coming together and interweaving of narratives (in the betwixt and between). By showing other 'sides' and interpretations of fragments of narratives, something that seems so familiar can become utterly unfamiliar, or even alienating. The participants are confronted with the lack of any *a priori* judgment or interpretation. We "grow into knowledge" (Ingold 2011:164) through the coming together of narratives. Important is the critical questioning of "seemingly self-evident facts" (Gadamar 1982:13). Mady Schutzman told me about this deconstruction and the reconsidering of *a priori* judgments—especially within, for example, feminism or postcolonial studies—that:

> "And then that world itself, it needs to be reconfigured, that leads to a lot of debates too. Among feminism, one of the debates is about how much do we want to get what men want, and how much do we want to change the entire dynamic and structure. You know, that we [women] are trying to become successful. How successful do you really want to be in a world that is going to continue to teach you values that you don't believe in?" (Schutzman 2012b)

POSITIONALITY OF THE JOKER

> "The real issue is to understand one's privileged position in the process of helping so as not to, on the one hand, turn help into a type of missionary paternalism and, on the other hand, limit the possibilities for the creation of structures that lead to real empowerment." (Freire 2001:xxix)

There is not an indelible line between right and wrong Jokering. The Joker can be seen as a "wild card" (Boal 2003) as you try to refrain from posing your opinion on one side—even though you always have your opinions—and being apathetic and disengaged on the other side. It is about helping to create scenes and questioning, and giving emotional support when necessary—without imposing your will. There are a number of important aspects. One is the understanding of one's privileged position and being transparent about it. As a Joker you always have certain knowledge, but preaching about it is going too far. Moreover, the privileged position of a lot of Jokers is partly because they work with marginalised and/or subaltern[21]—"oppressed"—subjects and communities. The mobility Jokers enjoy—including, but not limited to, attending international conferences and working with communities abroad—is in sharp contrast to the immobility of those they work with.

Jokering is a process of asking questions and interrogating critically. Thus, it is not about pretending to be 'objective' or 'neutral', as "it is one thing to be familiar with a model, however; quite another for this model to be so internalised as to structure one's very thinking about the world" (Ingold 2011:99). For the Joker, curiosity is crucial. It means that, as Brent explained: "I can still feel very loyal to my socialist beliefs, but come to that group with curiosity. So this for me is the place for twenty-first century growth and liberation arts. It is not liberation if we are stuck in the same paradigm of 'this is right and this is wrong'. There is nothing liberating about that" (Blair 2012d). It is a process of refusing the 'truth' of any narrative and inquiring, questioning, interrogating thoroughly.

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[21] Which is "a person without lines of social mobility" (Spivak 2006:28).

LOCATION OF KNOWLEDGES

> "To teach is not *to transfer knowledge* but to create the possibilities for the production or construction of knowledge." (Freire 2001:30)

One of the foundations for Boal's ideas on pedagogy is the work of Paulo Freire (1921 – 1997). Freirean pedagogy has been pre-occupied with the 'location' of knowledge within the subjects (students in a classroom or participants in a workshop). It is based on the premise that knowledge can be collectively constructed or generated. This was a strong reaction against what Freire calls the "banking system" (Freire 2001:32) of knowledge, where individuals are empty containers that can be 'filled' with knowledge. Both Freire and Boal seem to have a strong aversion against anyone claiming to have 'true knowledge' of any given theme or topic. In TO, a Joker incites the collective and democratic generation of knowledge. Claiming to have a 'truth' works the wrong way, because there will either be a position of agreement or disagreement. Moreover, there are more ways it does not work, as Brent explained:

> "It's reversed colonizing. It's the shame-model. Which is 'I'm white, I come from a privileged and oppressive society, we oppressed your ancestor. I know nothing, I know nothing, you know *everything*, I know *nothing*'. It's very boring, it's very hurtful. It betrays communities, because they are looking to you for—often, they are looking for, unfortunately—leadership and guidance. But they are definitely not looking for you to acquiesce and abandon. So something in between." (Blair 2012c)

In this field, betwixt and between is an exchange of narratives that can bring about a confrontation of this singularity, through the exchange. Then "we have been transformed by the study of the other, so that we are not simply judging by our original familiar standards. A favorable judgment made prematurely would be not only condescending but ethnocentric. It would praise the other for being like us" (Taylor 1994:71). Claiming a 'truth', as well as "reverse colonizing", are both destructive (as well as productive in the Foucaldian sense, but that is another story). What happens is that the 'I' still decides whatever is of value and maintains its position as the subject, objectifying others and their knowledge. The 'I' is still the subject, the others do not have a voice in this process, and the colonial relations are maintained in the process. On the whole, for a Joker it is a challenging dance to democratically produce knowledge; he or she must refrain from judging too soon—or at

all. This counts for the content on one side, as well as the mode of conveyance, as I will elaborate on below. The dance is that:

> "I bring in information, but that's all I bring. I don't know what I'm in the presence of. So I have curiosity and questions and love and compassion and interest. I invite things. And I'm invited to things. Then it's just a very challenging space. But this is the space that we learn how to navigate, on some level, all of us together, and we encourage exercises and techniques that are going to foster this kind of ethos. This kind of culture. It's a culture." (Blair 2012c)

This navigation felt very similar to my own approach as a researcher. If a practitioner is transfixed with finding answers, they often forget to question thoroughly. During my ethnographic fieldwork I learned to 'ask the fool's question'. I noticed that the more obvious my questions were, the more fascinating the answers were. This is fundamental for TO as well. I talked with Barbara-June Dodge about the 'politics of clowning'. She explained: "the Joker is the one who asks the fools' question, [and] has a tremendous ability to open any encounter or conversation. And tell the emperor that he is naked with one *question*" (Dodge 2012b). Barbara-June gave an example of a faculty meeting, which shows how the critically interrogating disposition of a Joker gets incorporated. During the meeting they would talk about hiring a new dean. Barbara-June asked: "Does the person they are thinking of hiring actually know what the job is. Does that person know what a dean *does*?" (*ibid*). The response she got was: "Oh Barbare-June, come on!" and added: "But he didn't know". It is not an exception that obvious themes and topics are unfortunately avoided because they seem to be *too* obvious to ask. So by asking the fool's question there is a possibility to open this up; besides "it costs you nothing" (*ibid*).

Jokering is a process of asking questions—not of answering, but of creating more questions. A confrontation characteristic for Brent happened when I met him at the Starbucks on Hoover Street, just off the USC-campus. I was at the campus to follow one of the classes by Helene Lorenz, who teaches at the "Applied Theatre Arts"-program. Traffic was smooth—for a change—so I arrived early and went to the Starbucks to get an espresso. I saw Brent working at one of the tables so I greeted him and asked what he was working on. He explained he was working on his dissertation on "Liberation Arts and Community Engagement" ("LACE"), a method and methodology to work with communities, inspired by TO and a wide range of other sources. When I asked him: "When is your deadline?", he caught me off-guard with a question, instead of an answer: "Why do you want to know about my deadline?" As a sort of modern-day Socrates he threw back at me my own fascination with deadlines, that I originally projected on this interaction. "Why aren't you asking something else? What I have discovered today, for example?" I responded

that I was attempting to make small-talk, but at the same time realised that such a seemingly benign question can carry such a charge. He never answered my initial question. The next day we had a conversation about the encounter and how this reflects the role of the Joker:

> "The role of the Joker is not just to benignly accept everything, but the role of the joker is not to challenge people either. The role of the Joker is to question, and to question thoroughly, and to question critically. So to open up a space of criticality and questioning. As uncomfortable as it may be. […] The Joker sees things that other people may not see." (Blair 2012c)

ANGER AND HOPE

> "[The Joker interrogates] the link between people's emotional spectrum—depression, lack of desire, frustrations—that they think are based on themselves, things that sent people to therapy, and social organisations and institutions and cultural mythologies."
>
> —Mady Schutzman

The middle ground, inquiry and questioning, that the Joker navigates is influenced by a number of factors. Anger and hope are both truly important. I have found contradictions between participants on one side, and practitioners on the other side. Throughout my ethnographic fieldwork, whenever I had a conversation with a collaborator, I would bring in citations of authors or poets, as I was curious about the response. At one point I was talking with Brent about being angry or enraged as a Joker. I shared Nancy Scheper-Hughes' notion of "scholarship *with* commitment, an engaged (sometimes enraged) and militant anthropology" (2004:42). Brent's response—with his usual postcolonial sensitivity—was:

> "Yes, but not a conquering anthropology. So I can be engaged and enraged, without colonizing others. Because I am sure that the British thought when they came to Africa that they were engaged and enraged. 'Oh my god! They are killing twins, Africans are killing twins, and the Africans are treating women horribly'. *I am enraged.* 'You should have Christianity, you should be...' this is another kind of engaged and enraged. It is monological. I think this is a challenge for anthropologists and TO-practitioners." (Blair 2012c)

Important here is anger, an authentic form of anger, as the incentive of TO-practitioners (and anthropologists) to do their work—including the training and traveling, and all those and other costs involved. "You cannot do TO if you are not enraged about something", remarked Brent. The aspect of action and vigour is important here. I have heard from different collaborators that the United States is a culture that loves to talk. Hector appears to be full of energy and is on his feet working with communities year in year out. For Hector, it felt there is a sense of urgency to work with communities. Moreover, he dislikes too much talking, which is apparent throughout his workshops. His vigour has had other tones. Hector explained that, especially the periods when he recently arrived in the United States, and when his brother—who was still in Colombia—was murdered:

> "I know about myself that I was very pestiferous at that time […] I had a sense of urgency that had tones of despair and anxiety. Because I come from a war-torn country. Because I know what war is. War is not a soundbite for me, and [not like] beautiful fireworks at the TV screen. War, for me, was people being killed and many of those people being my friends. So I felt that a lot of people spent a lot of time talking about things […] they met and talk to feel that they were doing something because they were talking about it. For me, that was never enough." (Aristizábal 2012b)

The week after those conversations with Brent and Hector, I talked with Mady Schutzman about being angry. At certain conditions in society, for example, or on a certain theme or topic. For Mady, her core-awakening was around gender-inequalities while growing up in the fifties and sixties. Her personal experience is one of double standards in her own family, of what was allowed for her brothers, yet was not allowed for her, "it all started by being a women in this culture, that was the core of what enraged me" (Schutzman 2012b). Partly from her own experience, she remarked that a practitioner does not necessarily shares their anger with the participants. She remarked, out of her own experience, that "I didn't know better, it was so pervasive" (*ibid*):

> "[When] Boal started all of his therapeutic techniques people weren't angry, they were depressed. Anger is one stage. You don't have to reach people when they are at the anger-stage, it could be at the hopeless stage. Or maybe not hopeless, but depressed, stage. [The techniques are] to let people understand that maybe they *should be angry*. That they should be angry at external forces that are creating situations, that then they had become complicitous with, and have internalised. And now they are just, they are kind of angry at themselves. 'Why can't I live a better life?'" (Schutzman 2012b; emphasis added)

The other challenging aspect is hope. Brent gets his inspiration from a wide range of sources. When we talked about hope he referred to "Dante's Inferno": "So the sign over the gates of hell states 'abandon all hope ye who enter here'. […] I see this as a positive rubric for the TO-practitioners" (Blair 2012a;d). I can imagine him reading my utterly surprised face, and he continued: "When you are entering the underworld of oppression, and going into a land that you don't know anything—or much—about, and you are on a journey with everybody, your first obligation is to let go of all expectations. Let go of everything, and hope is a big expectation. So 'abandon hope', so you can enter with an open heart and a clean slate" (*ibid*).

If a Joker is hoping for change, whatever the intention, this can become dogmatic and oppressive. Brent reassured me that this did not always work for him. He recalled a workshop he did with a group of transgender and transsexuals, and asked them to make images. Brent himself is rather "hyperbolic", as Mady Schutzman called him, and he would say in his usual, energetic tone: *"Louder! Bigger!"* to the group. Which made them shiver, instead of opening up[22]. On the other side, for participants, hope—through the process of imagination—can be a incentive for change, "hope is a natural, possible, and necessary impetus in the context of our unfinishedness" (Freire 2001:69). Or as Anna Tsing remarked:

> "Hope is most important when things are going badly in the world; in the face of almost certain destruction, hope is a Gramscian optimism of the will. Such "unrealistic" hope begins in considering the possibility that tiny cracks might yet break open the dam; contingent openings are sites of unexpected force—for better or for worse." (2005:267)

FUSING THE HORIZONS

> "As we come, through the work of interpretation, to understand what at first appears alien, we participate in the production of a richer, more encompassing context of meaning—we gain a better and more profound understanding not only of the text but also of ourselves. In the fusion of horizons, the initial appearance of distance and alienness does itself emerge as a function of the limitations of our own initial point of departure." (Ramsberg and Gjesdal 2009)

[22] This raises the important question of the embodiment of narratives and how this works concerning the familiarity with ones own body. This is a whole other debate and I have no room to enter it here.

What happens in TO is both an adaptation of others' narratives and their (ideological) viewpoints, as well as—through humor and mockery—what Gadamer calls "self-distanciation" (Gadamer 1982:13). It is a process of questioning yourself and often laughing at yourself. However, as Gadamer also points us towards, "language at best conceals our thoughts" (*ibid*:9). Some narratives are—quite literally—*unthinkable* through language. Unfortunately, hermeneutics often focuses only on the 'text' and its interpretation and understanding, and much less on other modes of conveying a narrative. Seeing it externalised and played out, gives it a completely different hermeneutical dynamic. Or, embodying someone else's narratives—which never belongs to that person alone, simply because it is a narrative (as I have shown in the chapter "A narrative approach")—gives it a completely different understanding. By embodying narratives, and embodying their consequences, thus, making a narrative real, we can start to comprehend such a narrative.

Considering hermeneutics, the individual is not the locus of interpretation and understanding; it lies in that "each becomes bound up in the other's story" (Ingold 2011:160), as they are both narrator and narrated in the interaction. This intertwining is where the positionality of the Joker is exposed. Without the aspect of embodiment (and even with), there is always something that eludes our attention.

The notion of "emplotment", of the tendency towards coherency, also counts for the embodiment of narratives. When does the process of emplotment 'reveal' itself? "It is only when the attempt to accept what is said as true fails that we try to 'understand' the text, psychologically or historically, as another's opinion. The prejudice of completeness, then, implies not only this formal element—that a text should completely express its meaning—but also that what it says should be the complete truth" (Gadamer 2004:294). TO can be so strange that you "question what you are seeing" (Schutzman 2012c).

The workshops I participated in, mostly Jokered by Hector, are full of moments when a scene completely shifts. At one point he would ask the scene to be in Italian, when no one spoke Italian, and suddenly the naturalness of the narrative would be completely lost. Or, for example, during a Forum-play there would be "a serious scene with polka-music" (Schutzman 2012c). Thus, theatre can confront the process of emplotment and the experience of naturalness. Another example, during one of the workshops in Pasadena we were together with very young children all the way to elderly. During the reflection on the workshop afterwards, the mother of one of the youngest children remarked: "we are together with men and women, with adult and with kids. We forget the opinion of our kids so often and what they have to say is really important".

ROUNDING UP

I would like to finish by going back to a story Brent told me, about his time working in Rwanda using TO-techniques. We talked about the role of the Joker as a "critical interrogator" and he recalled a story about an (upper) middle-class woman in Rwanda. She had been left by her domestic worker, who was going to work somewhere else. The Joker asks to share stories of oppression, and the woman responded, calling her domestic worker the oppressor. As a Joker it is often best not to reject the story outright, even if the Joker does not agree with her. What Brent did is the following:

> "And here is a woman who calls her [the domestic worker] the 'oppressor'. So I just wanted us to all see what was in my head. So I invited her up to the stage, I said: 'Can you come up on stage?'. I set up a desk, a chair, and then we had the floor. I said: 'There are three levels. The desk, the chair, and there is the floor. Would you choose somebody from the audience to play your housemaid?' [And] she chooses her friend and then she comes up. 'Can you position yourself relative to your housemaid, in terms of financial power. How much money do you make here, how much money does she make here?' So she stands up herself on the desk, and puts her housemaid on the floor, standing on the floor. And then everybody else goes: 'No, no, no, she should be *sitting on the floor*. And everybody agrees. So she agrees, and she is blushing, and she says: 'Yes, probably sitting'. So I say: 'Can you now—in this position—just repeat to me how you feel oppressed'. And she is looking down and says: 'I am not oppressed'. And we all had a conversation [about being what it means to be oppressed] afterwards." (Blair 2012c)

What the "fusion of horizons" comes down to is that the Joker has a (inarticulate) backdrop consisting of a lot of knowledge, ideas and opinions, and often anger and hope for change. A Joker has their own experiences and passions. In conclusion: the critical interrogation is one of asking questions to ask more questions, without opposing the participant. What eventually happens is that, slowly:

> "We learn to move in a broader horizon, within which what we have formerly taken for granted as the background to valuation can be situated as one possibility alongside the different background of the formerly unfamiliar culture. The 'fusion of horizons' operates through our developing new vocabularies of comparison, by means of which we can articulate these contrasts. […] We have reached the judgment partly through transforming our standards." (Taylor 1994:67)

CHAPTER FOUR

Opening up

> "Intellectualism leaves us only with the choice between an understanding that consists of representations and no understanding at all. Embodied understanding provides us with the third alternative we need to make sense of ourselves." (Taylor 1993:173)

> "And since [we are] children we play theatre, until the adults tell us to take life seriously, and not play anymore. And when they do that to us—which is a crime—we are deprived of this powerful language that is theatre." (Boal 2009)

In the previous chapters I have elaborated on the "Theatre of the Oppressed" ("TO") as an approach to breaking with—through critical interrogation—with what I have coined "singular narratives." These narratives reduce the complexity and contradictory aspects of ordinary life experience to a single voice, a single consciousness. TO engages with subjects to produce on-the-ground knowledge of a certain theme or topic. By acknowledging and revealing the complexity of events and narratives, and by "being sentient"—responding to the whatever is offered, instead of responding in a dogmatic manner—pries these singular narratives open. In "Chapter Two: Shattering the singular" I have approached TO as a polyphonic endeavour, and in "Chapter Three: The Joker" I have shown that TO works as a fusion of horizons, that it creates new standards of judgement and valuation through the intertwining of narratives and their ideologies. In other words, TO incites the process of "going through the fire of relativism" (Feyerabend 2010:231fn4).

The following chapter will focus on the philosophy of science. I will argue that TO can be approached as an "open exchange", coined by Paul Feyerabend (1924 – 1994). This is an exchange in which the rules and standards are made in the process, through collaboration. Feyerabend was a controversial and remarkable figure. He had many admirers as well as critics, not the least because his ideas could shift abruptly, sometimes towards a complete opposite ideology. Feyerabend had fierce critique of the position of the sciences in society, and the pursuit of reason being the sole approach to knowledge. Moreover, he was fascinated by the arts, and used theatre in his classroom to communicate philosophy. At one point Bertolt Brecht was so interested in the Feyerabend's ideas

and work that he invited him to work for him as one of his production assistants (Feyerabend 2011:138). Apparently Feyerabend refused as he wanted to pursue another path. But theatre kept him interested and he combined lectures with theatre. During his classes students would be asked to act out certain concepts or ideas, to make them visual, to bring them to life. Art is often seen as something external to the human condition, as something unimportant. This rationality contradicts the idea of theatre as both a political weapon, as well as a means of collectively and democratically 'talking' about common themes and topics, and eventually generating knowledge. To cut a long story short, before I elaborate on this notion of "open exchange", I need to touch on the notion of *phronesis*, in order to make the distinction between embodiment and concepts more clear.

BY VIRTUE OF *PHRONESIS*

> "It is important that the scientific consequences of embodied understanding be developed." (Taylor 1993:174)

In the article *"To Follow a Rule..."* Charles Taylor (1993) draws heavily on the works of Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Ludwig Wittgenstein. Taylor notes: "what these men have in common is that they see the agent not primarily as the locus of representations, but as engaged in practices, a being who acts in and on a world" (1993:169-170). This different view situates the agent—the actor, the subject—within a certain chaotic and infinitely complex and uncertain context, whose acts are conditioned by both the actual context—they are *not* determined. I would argue that TO, now existing for over forty years, has already showed that awareness of the positionality of subjects is not merely a "flickering in the closed circuits of historical life" (Gadamer 2004:278). Important is that ordinary life experience, and the practices, the experiences, and the narratives of subjects, are quite separate from scientific concepts. However, they do influence each other, as Anthony Giddens (1938 -) points to with his notion of "double hermeneutics" (1982:13).

Narrative understanding, especially through embodiment, perpetuates beyond the boundaries of these concepts. Moreover, there is a field of tensions here. Taylor notes that: "there is a crucial '*phronetic* gap' between the formula and its enactment, and this too is neglected by explanations that give primacy to the rule-as-represented" (1993:177). When we take the former for the latter—when we confuse the map with the terrain—we destroy (or at least: neglect) a great deal of this infinitely complex set of contexts and experiences. Another approach that Taylor points us towards is an understanding of behaviour that comes from behaviour, and not from concepts somewhere detached from ordinary life experiences. Here, Taylor goes back here to Aristotle's "virtue of

phronesis"[23]. For Aristotle, "the intellectually courageous thing to do might conflict with the intellectuals' humble thing to do" (Greco and Turri 2011), simply because the intellectualist' accounts (these 'representations') might not accord with the actual context. A person who is 'practically wise' is someone who has some form of familiarity with the context, and acts by responding to the context—by "being sentient"—to that which is handed to him. In this light, I remember Hector's fierce critique of education, telling me that:

> "We all have some kind of knowledge—our experiences of life. Someone who is a farmer knows a lot about the earth, and if there is a big earthquake in Los Angeles, I would prefer to be caught in it with any of the clients that I have met that came from Mexico or Salvador, then any of the professors that I ever had in my life. I would probably starve to death with those professors, even those who taught environmental studies and things like that, because most of them have never touched the earth." (Aristizábal 2012a)

In other words, what this *phronetic* gap point us toward is that the dimension of acting, the dimension of everyday life experience, is fundamentally different and more complex than concepts, scientific or otherwise, can grasp. This is partly because of an "inarticulate backdrop" (Taylor 1993:173). The notion of tacit knowledge "plays a large role in the experimental parts of science and it needs the immediate reactions of a person, not just 'objective' statements, to become effective" (Feyerabend 2011:123).

A RADICAL OPENNESS

> "We see here how essential it is to learn talking in riddles, and how disastrous an effect the drive for instant clarity must have on our understanding." (Feyerabend 2010:201)

In Mady I found not only a wonderful interlocutor, I found a fellow anthropologist as well. We talked about TO and anthropology and we thought out loud about their possible interconnectedness. One of the topics was the documentary *"Re-assemblage"* by the Vietnamese (visual) anthropologist, postcolonial thinker, and feminist Trinh Minh-Ha. The documentary is deliberately incoherent, just as Minh-Ha's writings. Mady remarked on the documentary that each time the viewer might get an inkling of what is going on, a new shot comes that discredits, or juxtaposes the earlier shot. In the light of acknowledging such complexity, Mady remarked on what this means for

[23] *Phronesis* can roughly be translated as "practical wisdom", although the meaning has changed over time.

anthropology:

> "There are so many assumptions that are made, and that we form these assemblages—that are so riddled with partiality on the part of the assembler—that it might be smart to be disoriented. And let our assemblages, our ethnographies, reveal the honest degree of disorientation [...] and not reach for some kind of coherency, when there isn't any." (Schutzman 2012b)

Disorientation is a premise for openness, as Dipesh Chakrabarty remarked; it means to "hear that which one does not already understand" (2002:36). By embodying narratives, this radical openness is put into play because it 'forces' a subject to change his or her own stance, as the consequences and ideologies are made real as well. In the "Vignette" we have also seen that a conflicting ideological position (Gabriela and her father) are embodied too. This "radical openness" is necessary as it is hard to know what one is missing if one does not know where to look. However, a radical openness can come paired with a feeling of disorientation. Ingold adds:

> "Yet along with openness comes vulnerability. To outsiders unfamiliar with this way of being, it often looks like timidity or weakness, proof of a lack of rigour characteristic of supposedly primitive belief and practice. The way to know the world, they say, is not to open oneself up to it, but rather to 'grasp' it within a grid of concepts and categories. Astonishment has been banished from the protocols of conceptually driven, rational inquiry. It is inimical to science." (Ingold 2011:74)

OPEN OR GUIDED?

> "In such a case—and I think that the case of science is like that—speaking of truth means making an assumption about the way the world is built and acting on it." (Feyerabend 2011:116)

I have approached TO both as a "polyphonic" interaction, as well as a "fusion of horizons". I will now shift my approach to that of the "open exchange", which I adopt from Feyerabend. Most of Feyerabend's work is within the Philosophy of Science. The most acclaimed (and most criticised) of his works is *"Against Method"*, which was first written in 1975—roughly the same time the

revised edition of Gadamer's *"Truth and Method"* was published—in which Feyerabend fiercely criticises using a fixed and singular method for doing research; as this will only maintain the current set of methods and theories, instead of inventing newer—and better—ones. The underlying idea is a certain openness to using different approaches for the same issue. Thus, Feyerabend distinguishes between the "guided exchange" and the "open exchange", and remarks about the former:

> "In the [guided exchange] some or all participants adopt a well-specified tradition and accept only those responses that correspond to its standards. If one party has not yet become a participant of the chosen tradition he will be badgered, persuaded, 'educated' until he does—and then the exchange can begin. Education is separated from decisive debates, it occurs at an early stage and guarantees that the grown-ups will behave properly." (Feyerabend 2010:237)

In this guided exchange the participants follow a fixed, dogmatic exchange. Important here is that a guided exchange, by definition, denies or despises different contents and modes of exchange, as well as modes of being. The worldview implicit in this exchange is either taken for granted, seen as the most fitting, or as 'real'. In this light, narratives are reduced to mere stories, and their ideologies as either 'truth' or 'fiction'. The complexity and fragmentation, moreover, are approached with loathing. Feyerabend sees a 'rational debate' as the most far reaching guided exchange, in which the worldview implicit in the exchange—the "disengaged first-person-singular self" (Taylor 1993:169)—is *completely* taken for granted and projected as being 'natural'; that is, the only way to reach reality. Brent elaborated on the act of discussion, which is a closed exchange in the sense that each subject is defensive of their ideological position: "I am a proponent of dialogue. And not discussion" (Blair 2012d), and continued:

> "Discussion is always preceded by opinion. Which then necessitates a defensive posture. Like if I have an opinion that I am attached to, I don't come to this conversation willing to listen. I come closed. Or, when I come with a slight hope that my passion will convert you—and then this is moralising Christian evangelism, for example. […] Now, by the same token, my radical socialism, I come with a lot of opinions about capitalism, for example, so I constantly have to check myself and ask: 'am I coming with a heart of inquiry and curiosity, or am I coming with anger and toxicity, and foreclosure against any other possible opinion?'" (*ibid*)

Opposed to the guided exchange is the open exchange, which is part of an "open scientific world-view", in which the he declares that: "it is good news for those who believe that all cultures are in

touch with reality, that we can learn from the most 'downtrodden' and the most 'backward' people and that attempts to force 'genuine' knowledge on them shows not only disrespect but also a good deal of ignorance" (Feyerabend 2011:38). An open exchange, which follows from the often quoted—and misinterpreted—notion of "anything goes," (Feyerabend 2010:7) in which lies the notion of "methodological anarchism" (*ibid:*242). This does not mean that we should abandon all universal rules and measurements, but it that all rules have their limits, and we should, as Feyerabend argues, opt for a pragmatic use of different methods for inquiry, as opposed to sticking with a single methodology, since this only 'recycles' older theories, rather than progressing science collectively and democratically. Thus,

> "[The open exchange] is guided by a pragmatic philosophy. The tradition adopted by the parties is unspecified in the beginning and develops as the exchange proceeds. The participants get immersed into each other's ways of thinking, feeling, perceiving to such an extent that their ideas, perceptions, world-views may be entirely changed—they become different people participating in a new and different tradition. An open exchange respects the partner whenever he is an individual or an entire culture, […] an open exchange has no organon though it may invent one, there is no logic though new forms of logic may emerge in its course. […] it transcends it in a way that cannot be made objective but depends in an unforeseeable manner on the (historical, psychological, material) conditions in which it occurs." (Feyerabend 2010:237)

What happens in TO is that instead of searching for instant clarity, there is a process in which the participants generate knowledge. The openness is not to only considering their own narratives—the content—but also in the modes of conveying these narratives. TO uses the *whole* body, the whole "alphabet of bodily language", and not merely verbal language. It is by using the whole body—to come back to the notion of *phronesis*—is that the chaos of ordinary life experience and the intertwined and embodied narratives, are not to be confused with conceptual knowledge of any kind. There are, of course, limitations to TO, as not everyone is as familiar with their own body.

ROUNDING UP

In this chapter I have argued that TO can be seen as an open exchange. An exchange of narratives and ideologies in which the rules are not fixed in advance. It engages the whole human body and has room for other modes of being; for Hector this meant that: "we involve the body, not just the abstract thinking—although it is important. We involve images, we involve visuals, we involve

kinetic movement. And some of us are kinetic learners, some of us are visual learners. Some of us are conceptual learners. And all of those forms—those ways of knowing—are applicable in theatre" (Aristizábal 2012a). Implicit in my argumentation, which I will extend in the final part "Coda", is the link between arts and sciences. For me, this means that the sciences can "expand the scope of knowledges they produce and, most importantly, how and where those knowledges matter" (Dolan 1996:10).

CODA

Where do we go from here?

> "There is a space 'in between'[24] where culture typically resides when it rises to a criticality. When it's uncritical and colonised it's either mine or theirs. However, there is a third space that meta-narratives and criticality understand, that culture is actually more complex than just white, black, Indian, 'Other'. […] This is the space where we dance between *mine* and *yours*." (Blair 2012c)

Antonin Artaud (1896 – 1948) once compared theatre to the plague, the Black Death. Barbara-June Dodge remarked, in her usual witty intensity: "what happens is that you die—a kind of metaphorical death—and then you are inculcated. It makes the rest of your life what it is. It gets inside of you" (Dodge 2012b). Artaud writes in his work *"The Theater and its Double"* on this—rather remarkable—analogy that it is: "a disease which progressively destroys the organism like a pain which, as it intensifies and deepens, multiplies its resources and means of access at every level of the sensibility" (1958:23), and: "the plague seems to manifest its presence in and have a preference for the very organs of the body, the particular physical sites, where human will, consciousness, and thought are imminent and apt to occur" (*ibid:*21). What Artaud points out, and what I have shown throughout this thesis, is that theatre is not just a relaxing endeavour. Theatre is an *activity* that engages the whole body and can profoundly change a person's life—often for the better.

Moreover, adopting the approach of storied knowledge, I have showed that the narratives subjects 'tell'—through their bodies, by embodying them—always transcend spatial and temporal boundaries. A narrative, in its complexity and fragmentation, never belongs to a single individual, but flows through and out of the subject. In the setting of a workshop using the techniques of the "Theatre of the Oppressed" ("TO"), this opens up a new approach to the generation of knowledge. Moving beyond ontological hermeneutics, this happens through the intertwining of narratives, where narratives are embodied—which makes these narratives and their consequences real. Often narratives are seen as having some inherent 'truth', making these narrative definitive and

[24] Brent Blair is referring to Homi Bhabha's "Location of Culture" (1994;2004) and Gloria Anzaldúa's "Borderlands / *La Frontera"* (1987;1999).

"singular", and thereby foreclosing dialogue. "Singular narratives" are grounded in a certain spatial and temporal context—just as in ordinary life experience and performance. TO undermines singular narratives by recognising the complexity and fragmentation of an event. In the bulk of this thesis I have sketched out the core principles of TO; in "Chapter One: Foundations", the intertwining of narratives became clear. In "Chapter Two: Shattering the singular", "Chapter Three: The Joker", and "Chapter Four: Opening up" I have sketched out three views to question, and ultimately break with, singular narratives: first of all, the participants in a TO-workshop start to acknowledge the polyphonic nature of all human interactions, both between and inside subjects themselves; second, the Jokers incite a fusion of horizons, as each subject has their own viewpoints and ideologies, and by embodying the narratives told by 'others'—including their consequences and realities—horizons broaden and merge; third, from the light of research, TO raises questions on the difference between discussion—and other forms of guided exchange—on one side, and an "open exchange", in which the rules and valuations come forth through interaction, on the other side. I will sketch out a view on science by extending the analogy of the wild card—and do so partly by going back to "A narrative approach".

THE SCIENCES

> "But science is not sacrosanct. The mere fact that it exist, is admired, has results is not sufficient for making it a measure of excellence." (Feyerabend 2010:223)

> "What has been achieved in philosophy should become part of the tacit knowledge of the sciences, not an item that is added from the outside." (Feyerabend 2011:128)

The humanities and social sciences have originally been modelled after the natural sciences (Sokal and Bricmont 1998:6). The "reflexive turn", among others, has been a process of distancing anthropology from other sciences. This has made anthropologists aware that the anthropologist is inseparable from the research itself. In this light, a crucial question that has been raised is the notion of standardisation or universalisation of methods and methodologies. The natural sciences (and indirectly, still, anthropology) have a tendency of excluding the objects from their context in order to study them. In this process the other is constituted as the object of knowledge. Or by focussing on so-called 'structures', separated from ordinary life experience, as Foucault remarked on the fallacy of structuralism: "the event is what always escapes our rational grasp, the domain of

'absolute contingency' (1980:113). The implication is that a dialogical relation between the researcher (the subject) and the researched (the objects of knowledge) are avoided (Spivak 2006:28). However, anthropology has been strongly influenced by Clifford Geertz and his recognition that: "what man is may be so entangled with where he is, who he is, and what he believes that it is inseparable from them" (Geertz 1973:35).

Moreover, I do recognise that a number of important scholars (Anna Tsing for example) already imply the importance of "global connections". The recent era has been one of experimenting with other forms of science—especially in the light of postcolonial studies—and relativising universal modes of research. Even post-positivism is being questioned—by postcolonial studies, for example—as being a 'western' tradition (Smith 1999:167;174). The dialectics of questioning on one side, and the standardisation of research on the other side, can be, in turn, seen as the searching for a new (tentative) common language through collaboration (Tsing 2005:17).

Dipesh Chakrabarty remarked, about the rationality of modern science, that it "gives us only a partial hold on our lives—and that too through necessary, much-needed, yet, inevitably poor translations" (Chakrabarty 2002:37). Two things are important here: we need these translations to communicate, otherwise it will leave us merely with gibberish, but we should be critical towards the idea that, inevitably, elements and fragments will get lost in translation. Thus, instead of falling into a downward spiral of breaking down and fragmentation, we can look at the fragments and see them for what they are.

Moving further away from the natural sciences might imply that: "when we cease to pursue the ideal of method and objectivity, we admit of introspection, personal experiences (*'Erlebnis'*) as the foundation of human insights." (Gadamer 1982:5). In the "Introduction" and the chapter "A narrative approach" I have sketched out the danger of relativity as a process of "different world views coming into play, which would naturally be completely unacceptable to the objectifying scientific approach" (*ibid*). Put another way, what Jacques Derrida remarked about this tension is: deconstruction is *not* meant as "a strategy for nihilism, an orgy of non-sense, a relapse into the free play of the arbitrary" (Kearney 1984:124).

In this light, I have found a middle-ground in which: "one must abandon *radical* doubts concerning the viability of logic or the possibility of knowing the world through observation and/or experiment" (Sokal and Bricmont 1998:189; emphasis added). Thus, we need language, we need to reason, and we need sciences in order to comprehend and understand. We need all of that, up to the point where it becomes grounds of accusing others for being 'irrational' or 'unreasonable' in a exclusionary or hierarchical sense. Throughout this thesis it has become clear that navigating this 'hall of mirrors'—in which everything seems merely "self-referential" (Harvey 1989:336)—is possible by the critical interrogation of the narratives that come up and intertwine in a TO-

workshop. The Joker questions all the elements: protagonist and antagonist, past, present and future, and desires and fears, and much, much more. Moreover, it focuses on asking new questions, not solely on finding answers.

BRIDGING ANTHROPOLOGY AND THEATRE

> "A scientist is an explorer of the unknown. An explorer heeds instruments, vehicles and clothing—will he use the same instruments, vehicles and clothing in Uganda and on the South Pole?" (Feyerabend 2011:121)

Participating in TO-workshops throughout my thesis gave me inspiration to further rethink the relationship between anthropology and theatre, and what they might learn from one another. Traditions and practices become most clear whenever "a rich, well-articulated and familiar practice […] is confronted by a practice of a different kind that can interact with it" (Feyerabend 2010:224). Feyerabend has been another inspiration to look at the role of science in society and what science can and should study (1978:63), and to look, pragmatically, to other approaches to anthropology—especially the epistemological and hermeneutical aspects. Continuing with the impetus of "Chapter Four: Opening up", I will elaborate on the relationship between anthropology and TO.

Anthropology, since participation is already in its nature, has a unique opportunity to engage with subjects and their peculiar modes of being, and committed to de-construct the own modes of becoming of the anthropologist, through the confrontation with the 'other'. If we approach TO as a research method in itself, as practice *as* research (Borgdorff 2006:5;13), then we can approach TO-workshops more seriously. Instead of approaching the generation of knowledge as something often only reserved for 'real' science. TO can be a 'structure' for an interaction that intertwines narratives and their ideological viewpoints, and interrogates critically to generate more questions. Mady remarked, out of her background as an anthropologist, of the link between the two practices:

> "[It is about] questioning these typical ways in which cultures interact with each other, and these huge power dynamics between cultures and between nation-states. So [TO is] doing the same thing—in a way—as anthropology. At least on the colonising side of things. It is looking at the power dynamics on that level. […] I mean the methodology too, just simply the methodology of Boal […] it requires that you talk to each other. Everybody is a subject, everybody can be interrogated. The interrogation has to happen in both directions." (Schutzman 2012c)

What I am aiming at is not the abandonment of anthropological methods, or, by the same token, insist that every anthropologist should participate in TO-workshops (even though they are eye-opening and mind-blowing—and a lot of fun). But re-thinking, again and again, the relation between practice and theory, and body and mind. For example, as Jill Dolan remarked—long ago—on this relationship: "theorising can be an embodied practice even if we do it sitting around seminar tables; it's embodied in our visceral, emotional reactions to praxis" (1996:12). Thus, I would argue, the view changes from where you are standing, but also changes from where you are standing *within yourself*, as embodied narratives—and their knowledge—are not just merely intellectual and/or verbal. There are contradictions between different modes of 'telling' a story, where often the journey between the mind and body is much shorter than the one between the mind and tongue.

THE WILD CARD

> "These deep-seated attitudes constitute our ideology and they set the boundaries of theory, by inclining us to this or that set of issues and explanations. *If our explanations are theoretical, our questions are ideological.*" (Robinson 2011:88; emphasis added)

To conclude, I will elaborate on the extension of the analogy of the Joker. The Joker can, thus, be seen as a "wild card", the person who coordinates and incites the creation of, and playing with, the images, sounds and emotions that come up during the intertwining of narratives. They bring in information, they invite things, and are invited to things; the narratives guide the interaction, and whatever happens, happens. I would like to make the incentive for the anthropologist to roll away the stone, move out of the shadow of the natural sciences—once and for all—and into the bright sunlight that is the life of the subjects we so dearly wish to study. What the Joker does is question—thoroughly and critically—without ever attempting to hide their own positionality behind a facade of "scientific rigour" (Freire 2001:xi). This questioning is not to find answer to fit these 'objects' into categories that are pre-fixed, somewhere outside of the context of the subjects, but to look for *more questions*. Let this be an incentive to re-think anthropology. The questions so often asked during the workshops—*'What do we see here? Does this happen in our lives? What would we do?'*—are crucial. Everybody is a subject, and everyone participates in the generation of knowledge; it is about "articulating your own views, and making a mess of it" (Schutzman 2012b).

Feyerabend remarked, in *"Against Method"*, that in the process of "proliferation", the re-discovering and questioning of scientific methods, the anthropologist "must be able to talk nonsense until the amount of nonsense created by him and his friends is big enough to give sense to all its

parts" (Feyerabend 2010:201). The moment we start seeing the TO-practice as research, and move away from the idea of science as a set of fixed discourses, we can pragmatically experiment and create nonsense. The body, with all its contradictions and all its stories, is brought in right in the middle of it. And moving past the idea that all the parts, all the fragments, must make an immediate sense—thus, foreclosing any detour of critical interrogation. It is a process of defeating common sense and intuition by experimentation through aesthetic and theatric techniques. It is inviting the 'expert' to collaborate and engage, and democratise the generation of knowledge, creating new forms of participatory research and inventing new types of researchers; a "Joker-ethnographer", for example. We are all poets as we engage in the process of *poiēsis*—of bringing forth meaning in a context.

* * *

Let us take the responsibility to produce knowledge—both postmodern and postcolonial—that matter, not only for some scientist in an ivory tower, but for those we study directly. This means going through the "reflexive turn", through the fires of relativism, and starting to take the responsibility for what knowledge is produced by engaging in an intertwinement of narratives, with all their complexities and ideological standpoints. The question of navigating the 'hall of mirrors' is central: *'How should we question and interrogate precisely that which—all too often—eludes our attention?'* Why, theatre of course! It is by acknowledging that we can, and should, take the responsibility to produce knowledge that matter, not for the anthropologist, but for the subjects we wish to study—this should include ourselves as we embody and play out narratives. Science should not guide our way, but the collective intertwining of our stories should, where both the production of knowledge and the physical senses are democratised. In other words, the question *'where do we go from here?'* should not, in my view, be followed with an answer, but with another question: *'where do we want to get to?'*

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CONVERSATIONS:

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a. April 12, 2012

b. April 27, 2012

Brent Blair

a. February 22, 2012

b. March 8, 2012

c. April 5, 2012

d. April 24, 2012

Hector Aristizábal

a. March 10, 2012

b. April 20, 2012

Joe Goode

a. March 23, 2012

Mady Schutzman

a. Febraury 27, 2012

b. March 19, 2012

c. April 26, 2012