Critical Approaches to Arts-based Research

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The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

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Critical Approaches to Arts-Based Research

Guest Editors Anne Harris
Mary Ann Hunter
Clare Hall

THEME

Arts based research (ABR), its products, processes and critical theorising have come a long way in recent times. Nuanced distinctions indicate the development of the field, as arts-informed research, arts-based research, practice-led research, applied research, and creative participatory action research all claim different relationships with the art and criticality present in such innovative scholarship. Finally, it seems, we are moving away from a defensive stance regarding arts based research and its 'validity', and toward a celebration of this proliferation of diverse ways of knowing, theorising and doing research. This 'coming of age' is evident in this special issue, which urges readers to move beyond binarised notions of scientific 'versus' arts based research that still at times dominates academic research environments and conversations, and outmoded practice/theory divides. For we co-editors and for the authors here, theorising is indeed a creative practice, and goes hand-in-hand with the epistemological and ontological potential of arts-making methods. This issue celebrates the opening of new doors in theorising innovative arts based research from a range of global contexts, theoretical and epistemological frameworks, and inter/disciplines. We avoid any attempt to codify or limit the parameters of what contemporary arts based research is or can be. Indeed, we seek the opposite: to highlight its ever-expanding possibilities.

The essays here aim to encourage critical analysis and dialogue about the objects and subjects of arts based research for contemporary times, poststructuralist, posthuman and other critical approaches to arts based research, and the interdisciplinary application of performative and practice-led research in transferable methodological models. We are pleased to be able to include digital assets with many of the articles in this special issue. Indeed, the layered and multimodal complexity of arts based 'outputs' or artefacts is one of its rich distinguishing features, and it requires commitment from editors and publishers to not always demand a 'reduction' back into text-based forms, a diminishment of many forms of ABR. For this we thank the UNESCO editorial and production team, and hope you enjoy this contribution to the critical development of the arts based research field.

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Shaping Research-Informed Theatre: Working beyond an 'Aesthetic of Objectivity'

AUTHORS

Julia Gray

Pamela Baer

Tara Goldstein

Ontario Institute
for Studies in Education
of the University of Toronto

ABSTRACT

This paper explores how, despite the recognition that qualitative researchers invent rather than represent their research findings through the process of *writing*, the same recognition is generally not adhered to amongst those who take up *performance* as part of their research process. The dominance of an "aesthetic of objectivity" (Denzin 2003, p. 73) assumes the performance is a neutral platform upon which research findings will be placed, thereby making them more accessible to audience members. This overlooks aesthetic interpretation, or 'shaping,' as an integral part of the development of research-informed theatre, which implicates a multiplicity of embodied perspectives, as well as multiple aesthetic modes of interpretation and expression. Currently there is a dearth of literature that speaks directly to this aesthetic shaping. As such, in addition to discussing an aesthetic of objectivity and how it is problematic, we will offer two examples from our own work and how aesthetic shaping was an integral part of project development and execution.

INTRODUCTION: THE GROWING POPULARITY AND COMPLEXITIES OF RESEARCH–INFORMED THEATRE

Research-informed theatre is a research methodology that engages in a set of research practices that analyse and share research findings in the form of dramatic scripts and performances. The world of research-informed theatre attracts a variety of people from a range of backgrounds. Practitioners include playwrights and theatre artists who are looking for ways to investigate a particular aspect of the human condition or a particular moment of human history that can be dramatized and performed for an audience. Additionally, practitioners include academic researchers working in a variety of fields – including anthropology, sociology, psychology, education, health care, women's studies, justice studies, ethnic studies, cultural studies, political science, journalism, human communication and performance studies– who are looking for an effective way to share their research findings with audiences both within and outside the academy. The three of us are both: theatre artists and academics. Tara Goldstein is a faculty member in the Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT), and teaches a graduate research methodology course on performed ethnography and research-informed theatre. Julia Gray and Pamela Baer are graduate students who are working

on research-informed theatre thesis studies with Tara, and Pamela is the coordinator of the Research-Informed Theatre Exchange (RiTE), a group which meets monthly to discuss participants' individual projects. Each of us also has extensive artistic training and practical experience in theatre creation among other art forms.

There are a variety of ways that research-informed theatre practitioners name and approach their projects. For example, qualitative researchers who have been trained in the research methodology of ethnography have named their projects "performed ethnography" (Goldstein 2012), "performance ethnography" (Denzin 2003), "ethnodrama" and "ethnotheatre" (Saldaña 2005, Saldaña 2011). Theatre artists have used the terms "reality theatre" (Wake 2010), "verbatim theatre" (Brown 2010), and "documentary theatre" (Smith 1994, Filewod 1987) to name their work (for details on these different terms and their varying perspectives, please see Ackroyd & O'Toole 2010). We have chosen the umbrella term 'research-informed theatre' to refer to our work because it allows us to engage with two academic fields: the field of performance and the field of research. Although we have embraced the term research-informed theatre, we understand that there are nuanced differences between each of the distinct terms described above and the perspectives their practices bring.

Within the last 25 years, scholars have recognized that qualitative researchers invent rather than represent their research findings through the process of writing (Clifford 1986, Denzin 1997, Goldstein 2012). With the recognition of this inventive process and the need to move toward multi-sensory, multi-perspectival methods, many researchers have begun to turn to the arts, including performance, as a way to move beyond the limits of what can be shared with the written word (Denzin 2003, Kontos & Naglie 2006, Goldstein 2012, Cole & Knowles 2008, Leavy 2008). Theatre has a long history of engaging audiences in social, political and ethical debates (Boal 1979, Brecht 1964,

Salverson 2001, Jackson 2007), and extending the historical theatrical connection between pedagogy and aesthetics to include research appeals to qualitative researchers who are looking to engage with alternative research methods.

Research-informed theatre methodologies have become popular in Western educational research because they provide researchers with particularly rich ways to collect, analyse and share research. The richness comes from three sources: (1) the ethnographic research from which a play script is created; (2) the reading or performance of the play; and (3) the conversations that take place after the reading or performance. In these follow-up conversations, research participants and other readers or audience members have input about the conclusions of the research. This allows for ongoing analysis of the research findings. The incorporation of audience input into ongoing revisions of the play provides an opportunity for collective analysis, and in doing so, can help create more ethical relationships between researchers, their research participants and the communities to which the research participants belong. Post-reading/performance conversations also allow qualitative researchers to link up their research to their teaching and larger public forums on pressing social issues. For example, at OISE/UT the reading and performing of critical ethnographic scripts have engaged teacher education students, graduate students and the general public in critical analysis and discussions of critical teaching practices in the areas of multilingual, anti-racist, and anti-homophobia education (Sykes & Goldstein 2004, Goldstein 2000, Goldstein 2004, Goldstein 2005, Goldstein et al. 2014).

Over the last two years the three of us have been working together on several research-informed theatre projects. Our current work involves a consideration of what might be involved in designing research-informed theatre projects. In collaboration with a third graduate student, Jennifer Salisbury, we have argued that there are three areas that need to be considered when conceptualizing and designing a research-informed theatre

project; research, aesthetic and pedagogical (Goldstein et al. 2014). We have devised 30 questions that research-informed theatre practitioners can ask when they begin to conceptualize their projects. The questions evolved from discussions that took place in Tara's first Performed Ethnography and Research-Informed Theatre course in the winter of 2013 and have been organized into eight sections: goals and assessment; audience(s); responsibilities to research participants; responsibilities to the audience(s); responsibilities to the research-artistic team; ethnographic research design; aesthetic and theatrical design; pedagogical design and honouring and negotiating multiple commitments to research, aesthetics and pedagogy (Goldstein et al. 2014).

In this article, we want to focus on the complexities of aesthetic design, or 'shaping,' in research-informed theatre; specifically its' interpretive and analytic relevance as well as its' means for engaging audiences with research and pedagogical goals. In her research-informed theatre work in health (Gray 2009, Gray & Kontos, 2015), Julia has become particularly interested in the need to move beyond what Norman Denzin calls "an aesthetic of objectivity" (Denzin 2003, p. 73). Building on an argument put forth by Dani Snyder-Young (2010), Julia argues that, if recognized at all, the aesthetic design is often understood as an added layer that either obscures or garnishes pedagogical and research goals, rather than as an integral part of the project. Those taking up an aesthetically objective perspective, assume a linear trajectory between the original research findings and the performance itself expecting it to be a neutral platform for audiences to come in contact with those findings. This perspective overlooks the aesthetic interpretive work implicated in the creation process of the performance. Ultimately, the aesthetic design, or how the project is aesthetically shaped or crafted, is the way that research and pedagogical goals reach audience members, and as such this aspect of the project design must be further analyzed. Currently, there is a dearth of literature in this area.

This article unfolds in three remaining sections. In the next section, Julia further discusses an aesthetic of objectivity, its significance for research-informed theatre and specific ways that researchers might challenge its limitations. Following this, Julia cites her current research-informed project *Cracked: new light on dementia* (Gray et al. 2013) as an example of how she and her team drew on theatricality and the experiences of the research and artistic team as part of the development process. Following Julia's discussion, Pamela describes the study she and Tara have designed to research the experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) families in public schools and examines the ways it also tries to work beyond an aesthetic of objectivity.

CHALLENGING AN AESTHETIC OF OBJECTIVITY

There have been several critiques of the ways in which researchers have taken up an "aesthetic of objectivity" when engaging in performance ethnography (Denzin 2003; see also Snyder-Young, 2010; Gray and Kontos, 2015). Norman Denzin (2003), building on the scholarly work of documentary film-maker Trinh T. Minh-ha (1991, 1992), discusses how an aesthetic of objectivity indicates that the work presented through the performance is the "so-called real world" (Denzin 2003, p. 73) and discourages dialogue and investigation on the part of the audience. Gray and Kontos, 2015 extend these discussions about this aesthetically objective perspective by detailing how, within this frame, various stakeholders are encouraged to be detached from the research process and linger in textualism, overlooking the experiential and embodied aspects of the research findings and performance process. When taking an aesthetically objective stance, researchers are often seeking a 'natural' or 'authentic' presentation of the research findings, where people are presented in the 'real world' and in 'real situations.' The arts-based researcher is encouraged to be an

observer in the research process rather than an active member of knowledge production who is engaged in analytical work. Similarly, audience members are often understood to be passive recipients of the performance rather than actively engaged in interpretation. The performed work ultimately is grounded in text (such as interview transcripts), with people telling their experiences as actual fact rather than as their perspective.

An aesthetic of objectivity stems from ethical concerns about staying true to the participants' original experiences (Mienczakowski & Moore 2008) as well as the need to communicate discrete, actionable results that will be directed clearly to audience members looking to inform practice or policy (Sandelowski & Leeman 2012). With this focus on maintaining the original data as well as the intended impact on audiences for uptake in concrete ways, the significance of the aesthetic shaping of the performance is overlooked, which implicates a multiplicity of embodied perspectives, as well as multiple aesthetic modes of interpretation and expression. An aesthetically objective perspective is underpinned by a positivist philosophical approach where the researcher's paradigmatic position is rooted in notions of neutrality, rationality and an objective distance. [i] Given "researchers' ethical responsibility to create authentic representations of participants realities" (Jonas-Simpson et al. 2012, p. 1951; see also Ackroyd and O'Toole; Mienczakowski, 2009, 1999; Mienzakowski and Moore, 2008), it is understandable that the inventive nature of qualitative research, and more specifically arts-based research and research-informed theatre, is approached with caution.

As we attempt to engage in wider mobilization of our findings, and engage with research participants in more complex ways, deeply exploring how these practices should be accomplished responsibly should not be underestimated. However as part of these discussions the aesthetic aspects of research-informed theatre work are rarely broached. Often the aesthetic elements are understood to be a kind of mirroring mechanism

i
For more information on the positivist paradigm, please see Creswell, 2013.

for previously interpreted research findings rather than an interpretive process unto itself. When aesthetics are considered, they are often framed as "artistic licence" (Jonas-Simpson et al. 2012; see also Gray et al., 2001; Mienczakowski, 2009; Saldana, 2005). The difficulty with this language is that it implies that the artistic work takes liberties with the expression of the research findings, rather than providing opportunity to deepen understandings and make space for audience members to access the material. Similar to the writing process for other qualitative researchers, we argue that an aesthetic interpretation occurs throughout the development of the research-informed theatre project. Attention to aesthetic interpretation is often overlooked due to the dominance of an aesthetic of objectivity. There are a small number of qualitative researchers who recognize the importance of aesthetics in arts-based research projects. Laurel Richardson (2000) for example includes "aesthetic merit" in the five criteria she puts forward for assessing creative analytic practices.

Aesthetic interpretation can occur in multiple ways such as through the dramatic structure of the play (or how the play might unfold, what happens to the characters, etc.), the performers presence and physicality (such the performer's posture and gestures as well as vocal intonations), the staging (or how actors are positioned on stage, who is in a position of power, who is in a position of subjugation, etc.), as well as the language and words used in the script. Each of these aspects, and many more, should be considered in developing a research-informed theatre project (for more information on developing and producing research-informed theatre please see Goldstein 2012, Saldaña 2011). An aesthetic interpretive process need not be seen as obscuring research findings which have been rigorously interpreted prior to the performance process. Rather this process can be an opportunity to deepen pedagogical and research commitments (Goldstein 2008, Goldstein et al. 2014).

Applied Theatre scholar Dani Snyder-Young (2010) advocates for performance ethnographers (and we extend this to other research-informed theatre practitioners) to draw more clearly on theatricality as a way to move beyond an aesthetic of objectivity. This theatricality can inform a performance in a number of ways, such as engaging with a participatory aesthetic where artistic decision making is moved to participants or audience members by posing problems rather than offering solutions (please see Example 2 below) or engaging metaphor, imagery and design (Boal 1979, Goldstein et al. 2014, Gray 2009, Jackson 2007). Building on this, we advocate that research-informed theatre practitioners openly draw on the multiplicity of perspectives inherent in the performance creation process, such as those belonging to the original research participants, the arts-based researchers involved in the translation of the data into theatrical form and the audience members whose perspectives are not yet known to us (Goldstein et al. 2014, Gray & Kontos, 2015).

As an example, Snyder-Young discusses a performance of Philip Taylor's (2006) ethnotheatre piece *Beautiful Menaced Child* at New York University's 2006 Forum on Ethnotheatre and Social Justice. During this performance Snyder-Young imitated Edvard Munch's 1893 painting "The Scream" with the outcry of an actual scream, mouth wide open, hands on either side of her face (Snyder-Young 2010, p. 888). Study participants, who had come in contact with teenage suicide on the campus of a large, elite, private university, had not literally stood in their interviews and screamed in this way; however, this scream represented the powerlessness, rage and frustration they spoke about. This use of theatricality and an embodied metaphor, reflected the essence of the idea through visual language without presenting exactly what happened in the data gathering setting, expressed what was a key emotion that resonated throughout the study's research findings. This metaphor engaged audience members clearly but with enough 'space' for audience members to find their way into the idea being expressed (Jackson 2007,

Gray 2009). The argument here is not novelty for the sake of novelty, or "artistic licence" (Jonas-Simpson et al. 2012); rather, like Snyder-Young, we advocate for aesthetic, expressive forms that emerge out of and strengthen the analysis of the data set. Building on earlier discussions, the relationship between theatrical form and research findings is significant, as the process moving from raw data to performance is one that is interpretive and analytical.

We argue for a research-informed theatre that acknowledges the multiple embodied perspectives in the performance process and engages theatricality as a way to deepen pedagogical and research goals. As a way to move beyond an aesthetic of objectivity, our intention is to explicitly acknowledge aesthetic shaping as part of our research-informed theatre work by making obvious the embodied, interpretive aspects of performance that are inherent in the form and linking these aspects more clearly with research practices (Snyder-Young 2010, Gray & Kontos, 2015, Denzin 2003, Saldaña 2005). As such, we will present two examples: the first is an example from a research-informed play called *Cracked: new light on dementia*, and the second is the description of a performed ethnography study about LGBTQ families in schools.

EXAMPLE 1: *CRACKED: NEW LIGHT ON DEMENTIA*

Cracked: new light on dementia was first performed in November 2013 to audiences including people with dementia, their family members and health professionals working with people with dementia. [ii] The live play is based on research conducted by Drs. Sherry Dupuis, Gail Mitchell, Pia Kontos, and Christine Jonas-Simpson [iii] , health researchers who specialize in the areas of aging and dementia, and aims to cast a critical light on society's one-dimensional view of dementia as an unquestionable tragedy (Mitchell et al. 2013). *Cracked* raises questions about the predominant notions of loss that define our understanding of dementia. The play is intended to inspire alternative ways

ii
Cracked *was developed through funds attained through Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Ethics approval was received through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo.*

iii
The research team includes Dr. Sherry Dupuis (PI), Partnerships in Dementia Care (PiDC) Alliance, University of Waterloo; Dr. Gail Mitchell, School of Nursing, Faculty of Health, York University, York–University Health Network Academy of Nursing; Dr. Pia Kontos, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute – University Health Network, Dalla Lana School of Public Health; Dr. Christine Jonas–Simpson, School of Nursing, Faculty of Health, York University.

of seeing persons with dementia, instill the importance of maintaining strong relationships with them, and reinforce the imperative for good ethical care. Between the spring of 2011 and November 2013 [iv] , a series of workshop development phases were held with playwright, director and arts-based researcher Julia Gray, a team of professional artists [v] and the team of health researchers. For the purposes of this chapter, Julia will discuss the play's opening scene to demonstrate how the team attempted to move beyond an aesthetic of objectivity through this research-informed theatre project.

Health researcher Kontos shared with the artists an excerpt from one of her articles (Kontos & Naglie 2007), which discusses socially acquired habits of the body and the importance of recognizing and responding positively to social modes of expression by persons with dementia. This excerpt is taken from a focus group conducted with health care providers working with people with dementia in a long term care facility. This health care provider is speaking about her experience witnessing the actions of a person with dementia who was previously a farmer.

> *"In the middle of the night, 3:00am, he gets up and goes in the middle of the hallway, and he's doing like this [demonstrating the motions of planting] because he is thinking that he is still a farmer and has to wake up early to plant the rice, or whatever."*

Based on this description, one of the actors MacLean, who was raised and lived in Nova Scotia for a great part of her adult life, lead the team through an improvisation exercise based on lobster fishing. Nova Scotia is one of Canada's eastern coastal provinces with strong economic, cultural, social and historical ties to the fishing industry. Ultimately this improvisation was honed to become the opening scene for the play. All props and set pieces indicated in this scene are mimed and created by the actors' bodies (such as the light house).

iv
For more information on the development of Cracked, please see Goldstein, Gray, Salisbury and Snell (2014).

v
Actors involved in the play's development included Susan Applewhaite, Lori Nancy Kalamanski, Jerrold Karch, Mary–Ellen MacLean, Tim Machin, Claire Frances Muir, Mark Prince & David Talbot, although the play was ultimately performed by Susan Applewhaite, Lori Nancy Kalamanski, Mary–Ellen MacLean, Tim Machin, Claire Frances Muir, Mark Prince & David Talbot. Aynsley Moorhouse was the project's assistant director.

Scene:

On the upper right hand side of the stage, three actors stand with their backs to each other in a circular shape. They slowly turn in this circle, their arms are in front of their bodies, palms together at chest height. One of the actors makes the sound of a fog horn. As they turn, the actor facing the audience slowly opens her/his arms, and then slowly closes them again. Together they create a light house.

At the first sound of the fog horn, four actors (two actors on each side of the stage) with their backs to the audience slowly move towards centre –their arms ripple, they make the sounds of waves and the wind. As they move toward centre stage, each actor flaps her/his arms like the wings of a bird, and make the sound of cawing seagulls. With this flick of their bodies and their arms, each actor becomes a person and suddenly they have transported the audience to an ocean side wharf.

Two women are chatting, holding baskets of food. One man, crouched towards the audience, attempts to untangle a net, humming to himself. A single woman skins fish in another corner of the stage. At the top of the stage, three figures, ELAINE, her brother JOHN and her father DUNCAN, enter complaining about their heads from the night before.

JOHN walks across the wharf towards NET DETANGLER.

JOHN (kicking NET DETANGLER gently) Hey, you made it.

NET GUY Oh, get lost.

JOHN laughs, turns back towards ELAINE and DUNCAN.

ELAINE (shouting to the NET DETANGLER) How's your head?

NET GUY Oh lord, no better for seeing you!

They laugh, and chatter amongst themselves, as JOHN

gets on the boat at the wharf and starts the engine.

DUNCAN OK, the rope there, Elaine.

ELAINE unties the stern of the boat and DUNCAN climbs aboard. ELAINE tosses DUNCAN the rope.

ELAINE There you go, Dad.

ELAINE and hops on the boat too.

As the boat moves away from the wharf and down towards the audience, the two women holding baskets of food and the woman with the fish, melt away. The man detangling the net morphs into a bird again, and shifts towards the back of the stage, only to melt away as well.

The boat stops near the audience, and ELAINE, JOHN and DUNCAN begin to unload lobster traps into the ocean. They lift the traps over the side of the boat together, and as they release the traps into the water, their arms wrap around each other. They begin to sing "Farewell Nova Scotia" as they load more traps into the ocean.

ELAINE and DUNCAN continue to work, and JOHN drifts away, disappearing off stage. Soon, DUNCAN disappears also. We notice ELAINE's body is frail and slower. At this time, the other actors form a wall, running diagonally from the lower left corner to the upper right corner of the stage. ELAINE is by herself in a hallway, still singing.

A Nurse enters from the upper corner of the hallway.

NURSE Mrs. Carter, what are you doing? It's 3am. Let's get you back to bed.

What is relevant here is that, in developing the scene, the team was working from the assumption that the experiences of multiple people would come together through scene's performance

including the experiences of original participants (the health care provider and the person with dementia who was formerly a farmer), the team of arts-based researchers interpreting the data (including MacLean from Nova Scotia), and audience members who were largely unknown to the team during the development process. Through the original improvisation exercise, MacLean was not attempting to replicate the original excerpt from the focus group which described the former farmer's actions of planting. As Kontos explained it, the physical habits that this farmer had acquired during his lifetime were still an integral, embodied part of his personhood and were being expressed through his movements. Because of MacLean's deep personal connection to her home, Nova Scotia, and the social, cultural, geographical, economic and work-oriented aspects of that province, MacLean's experiences became an important part of the research process. Through her embodiment of these things, the team had an immediate connection to the theoretical notion of socially acquired habits of the body. We chose to capitalize on the immediacy of her experiences by developing the scene based on lobster fishing, which moved us away from directly translating the original excerpt describing the resident engaged in the motions of planting.

It is important to note here that MacLean and the other actors were not merely tools through which the data flowed. The actors were bringing themselves fully to the creative process and the performance, drawing on their embodiment and all of their "sexual, racial and other particularities" (Jones 1998, p. 5). This scene's development initially drew on MacLean's lived experience as well as the research finding provided by Kontos, and as part of what MacLean brought to the process, the other actors were able to connect to the broader research findings through the enactment of the scene. This engagement also led the actors, and by extension the whole team, to an emotional and vulnerable depth. This emotionality on the part of the actors provides a more layered, dynamic, challenging

research-informed theatre project and ultimately gives signal to and allows audience members to engage with the material deeply and with complexity. There is a potential risk with this work that the performance may become muddled due to the multiplicity of perspectives, thereby reaching the audience in an unfocused way. The aim is to acknowledge and harness the many perspectives and use the theatrical form fully as an analytic and interpretive tool to provide focus.

Additionally as part of the development of the scene, the team engaged in theatrical techniques such as relying heavily on the actors bodies in telling the story: to construct the light house through the movement of the actors' arms, the sound of the fog horn made by one of the actors, the rippling of arms to represent fog and waves, the flapping of arms and the sounds of 'caw' to represent birds, etc. In moving to the performance event, this reliance on the actors' physicality and voices to portray particular images as part of the story telling gave the audience members 'space' to engage their imaginations in linking ideas to co-construct the story. With enough imagistic clues, through the movement and sounds of the actors and regardless that these images were not 'real' (for example, a human actor is not 'really' a bird but is instead 'playing at' being a bird), audience members were implicated in the performance process by engaging their imaginations; it is this direct engagement (rather than passive receptivity) that allowed audience members to be taken on the journey of what the characters were doing. Our interest was not to *tell* audience members about the relevance of socially acquired habits of the body, but to *show* them and ask them to work by engaging their imaginations in order for them to be a part of the performance experience.

It is our contention that, because audience members were allowed to be active members in the co-construction of the scene, and because they were taken on the journey of the characters, the discovery that Elaine is a senior living with dementia in a long term care facility, and this experience of lobster fishing is in her

memory and in her body, comes as a genuine surprise. With this surprise, a new crack of light is shed on Elaine's experience of dementia as one that is embodied, as well as personally, socially and historically situated, rather than seemingly disjointed, 'crazy' and tragic. This follows the research team's original pedagogical goals for the production: to inspire alternative ways of seeing persons with dementia, to instill the importance of maintaining strong relationships with them, and to reinforce the imperative for good ethical care.

This example from *Cracked* highlights how the team moved beyond an aesthetic of objectivity by drawing explicitly on theatricality. Our work included the use of storytelling and dramatic structure, the use of metaphor and imagery, as well as acknowledging and capitalizing on the multiplicity of embodied perspectives as part of the development and performance process.

EXAMPLE 2: LGBTQ FAMILIES SPEAK OUT ABOUT SCHOOL

LGBTQ Families Speak Out About School is a project that will research the experiences of lesbian, bisexual, gay, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) families in public schools across the Canadian province of Ontario. Specifically the research will conduct video interviews with LGBTQ families across Ontario, examining what these families say about their experiences in elementary and secondary schools. The research will focus on LGBTQ parent's discussions of successful strategies for countering homophobia and heterosexism at school, and we will upload the video interviews onto an online repository. We will then assess how, if at all, access to the interviews can support (1) other LGBTQ families in their own dealings with schools and (2) educators who are responsible for creating safe, positive, and queer schooling experiences for LGBTQ families.

The research team will also be working with theatre, visual, and media artists to share research data with educators in creative ways and to assess the effectiveness of arts-based methods. Through this work we will be moving beyond an "aesthetic of objectivity" in the following ways: (1) We will be working beyond traditional theatrical modalities by engaging different artistic mediums, including the aesthetics of new media, video, music, and visual art; (2) we will move towards what Pamela calls a "participatory aesthetic" (Snell 2014) by engaging research participants in the creative process and (3) we will be making the initial research interviews available online, creating a database of stories and building an oral history collection. For the purposes of this article we will focus on the first two activities: working beyond traditional theatre and towards a participatory aesthetic.

THEATRE AND BEYOND

As discussed above, theatre is a medium with the potential to highlight contradictions, facilitate discussions, and allow researchers to connect directly with audiences (Goldstein 2008). In recent years, research-informed theatre has continued to evolve within the boundaries of theatrical spaces and performances (Gray 2009, Goldstein 2012, Ackroyd & O'Toole 2010). With the LGBTQ families in schools project we plan on using theatricality and performance aesthetics in partnership with other art forms. The inter-disciplinary arts outcome will emerge through a devising process in which participants and artists will make use of the video interviews to create a performed media project, mixing performance work with that of video and new media. This will include live performers, along with projected archival footage, interview footage, and new media work created by participants. This format will challenge an aesthetic of objectivity by making use of different artistic forms to layer and complicate research findings (Goldstein 2012, Kaomea 2008, Goldstein et al. 2014). This integrated artistic

approach allows the aesthetic forms to speak to one another creating space to juxtapose (Ellsworth 2005, Sykes & Goldstein 2004), comment on (Rossiter et al. 2008), and reinforce ideas and themes from the research (Snyder-Young, 2010).

In order to highlight how the different art forms might support and challenge audience members to engage with the research findings in different ways, Pamela will describe a way the team may use photography, performance and new-media through an inter-disciplinary media project. Imagine the following: On a screen above the stage we see images of diverse family formations taken as family portraits. On a second screen we see close up photographs of faces depicting a full range of over exaggerated emotions. On stage through live performance we witness a single family getting ready for the first day of school followed by an initial meeting with a new teacher. Let us unpack what is happening in this performative moment. In the first series of images we are showing the diversity of family formations, yet by choosing to photograph them within the framing of a "family portrait" we are commenting on the heteronormative boundaries placed on families through the institutional norms of the schooling system. In the second series of images, faces and emotions are larger than life and the audience is confronted with a relatable humanity through a wide range of emotion, from joy to sorrow, and embarrassment to fear. Finally, on stage we see a non-normative or queer family engaging in their everyday, getting ready for school through a series of non-verbal movements and interactions, the literal dance of morning time as the family works to get out the door. As the family arrives at school and meets the teacher for the first time the onstage action freezes and the audience attention is recaptured by the projections. In this moment the teacher reaction could be any of the emotions presented on screen and the family formation could be any or all of the families in the projected images.

Working together through visual and embodied language the media and performance aesthetics provide a space for

interpretation and analysis. We could continue to layer in this way by adding an audio component, perhaps a story, song, or poem fades in as the on stage action freezes. This interplay uses the multi-modal artistic spirit of theatrical aesthetics to create one cohesive piece that assaults our senses and challenges our minds. Can audience members see themselves in the dance or the images? What is their expectation and/or reading of the teacher reaction? Is it negative? If so, could that be challenged through a story of positivity as the next segment of the piece?

As another example, the team will engage with a visual art installation as part of the broader project, which will involve photographs and visual interpretations of the data; participants and artists use text and themes from the data as a starting place to explore the visual language and representations inherent in the research. The visual art work will provoke audience members in a non-verbal way; images will speak for themselves telling a story through a frozen moment in time. The images will work to ask questions and evoke emotion, in this case creating a visual representation of the experiences of research participants. For example: what kind of images does the word 'school' conjure for students, teachers and parents? A prison, a wash of purple, a pile of books, a ticking clock. What happens when these images are presented as one collective piece of art? Do they create new meanings when explored in juxtaposition to one another?

Both of these aspects of the LGBTQ families in schools study, the inter-disciplinary media project and the visual art installation project, will engage with audiences on an empathetic and analytical level, they will work to engage audiences in a cyclical process of analysis, meaning making, and emotional connection. Harper (2005) believes that we must engage with the artistic, critical, and reflective elements of arts-based work in the same moment, moving between provocation, representation and analysis as opposed to presenting the artistic work to be later followed by analysis/discussion. Through a mixed aesthetic we are able to deepen our analysis, as the interrelationship between

our empathetic selves and our analytical selves develops. The LGBTQ families in schools study will address the need to create research-informed theatre work that is emotionally and viscerally engaging and intellectually challenging.

WORKING TOWARDS A PARTICIPATORY AESTHETIC

An important aspect of the research design for the LGBTQ families in schools study is the inclusion of research participants in the development of the arts-based teacher development workshops. Participatory approaches to arts creation stem from the fields of community art and applied theatre (Nicholson 2005, Taylor 2003, Predergast & Saxton 2009, Prentki & Preston 2009). In these disciplines artists work directly with community members to create an artistic outcome that reflects participant experience. Here the ownership, along with the voice, authority and artistic direction of the project are in the hands of the community members (Magallanes-Blanco 2009, Prentki & Preston 2009). Similar to participatory research, participatory approaches to research-informed theatre must work through a process of reflexivity when determining how to best engage in participatory work (Prentki 2009, Jordan 2008). As a form of research-informed theatre the research team, artistic team, and participant artists all work together, selecting issues they want to explore and rendering them into their chosen artistic format. A participatory aesthetic is rich in its vulnerability; it is gritty and raw with the accompanying high stakes inherent of personal narratives. Without the refined aesthetic of professional artists, participatory art work has the potential to be overwhelmingly powerful as it engages participants as performers in their own stories (Snell 2014). At the heart of a participatory aesthetic both performer and audience member engage in a moment of recognition, of being witnessed and validated (Snell 2013). It is through this moment of connection that participatory aesthetics are most affective.

Leavy (2008) argues that in visual art forms the artistic quality has the potential to be compromised by engaging participants as artists. I would suggest instead that we need to work to understand the richness and potential of a participatory aesthetic in terms of how it challenges an aesthetic of objectivity. The validity and ethical concerns that encourages researchers to maintain an aesthetic of objectivity, namely the desire to represent 'truth' and 'reality,' is challenged when we think about participants and audiences working together to construct knowledge. In this context participants maintain ownership over how their story is told and represented which provides an embedded validity to the artistic outcome (Lather 1986). Yet, it is important to maintain that these artistic representations are still engaging in interpretation as they analyze and produce data in the same moment. Creative work provides multiple outlets through which stories can be expressed and explorations deepened (Gullage 2012). Engaging participants directly in creation provides them the opportunity to maintain a figurative distance from their personal narratives, allowing the art to speak when they might otherwise feel silenced (Kazubowski-Houston 2010). As a research method a participatory aesthetic provides new possibilities for data collection and research dissemination.

Thompson (2011) believes that we spend too much time focused on the effectiveness of participatory projects and their social goals, and, in turn we forget that they these participatory projects also provide *affectiveness* through the art form. There is a relationship between the effective and affective aspects of this work and, as we work to understand what makes a successful participatory aesthetic, we will be building a form with strong pedagogical potential. Participatory aesthetics are achieved through community engaged work; that is of, by, and for a community, creating art that is extremely powerful because it presents a raw unpolished aesthetic that dives right for the heart of a story or event.

CONCLUSION

As there are calls for more theoretical depth to inform arts-based research practices broadly (Kontos et al. 2012, Boydell et al. 2012, Fraser & al Sayah 2011, O'Donoghue 2009), as well as areas where performance and research merge, including research-informed theatre (Rossiter 2012, Conquergood 1991, Denzin 2003), we argue that the aesthetic design within this work is woefully under acknowledged. This is due to the dominance of an aesthetic of objectivity in research-informed theatre, particularly in the social sciences (Snyder-Young 2010, Gray & Kontos In review).

Extending the discussions of qualitative researchers before us who have argued that the process of writing is not an objective act of representing research findings, but an inventive process, we argue that the performance process is also inventive. Clearer attention can be paid to the use of theatricality and the multiplicity of embodied perspectives throughout the performance process, including its development and the performance event itself.

If we are to pay close attention to the multiple people involved in the performance, questions emerge about how exactly this is accomplished. How do we navigate these many perspectives while grounding the work in the original experiences of the research participants? Additionally, does the way we think about navigating these multiple perspectives inform the way we approach questions of validity and authenticity? Does the embodied nature of performance shed any new light on ensuring a research-informed theatre project's validity? These questions make way for us to think on how embodiment, understood as how we come to understand the world through our bodies and lived experience, might provide continued theoretical depth to how we engage in the practice of research-informed theatre, moving beyond an aesthetic of objectivity.

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