

**Co-directing, Co-creating, Collaborating: A Self-reflexive  
study of my collaborative theatre-making practice.**

by

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## ABSTRACT

One of the first things any Drama or Theatre student learns is the maxim 'Theatre is a collaborative art'. However, the question of what it means to be truly collaborative in one's approach, the range of different types of collaboration, and the deep seated workings of the collaborative act, are rarely discussed in considering the art of theatre-making. This study uses self-study methodologies to examine my own practice of collaborative theatre-making, in order to gain a greater understanding of the educational implications of my work as director, theatre-maker, and educator. In so doing, I reflect on my own long-term, scholarly, creative, and pedagogical partnership, by examining our co-created work, the *FrontLines* Project, as the focal case-study of this thesis.

Section 1 answers the question "How do I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice? (with specific reference to the *FrontLines* Project), through a discussion of theories and practices of devising theatre, and a detailed analysis of the making of the *FrontLines* Project.

Section 2 considers the question "Who am I as a collaborator?". I engage with theoretical understandings of collaboration, and creative collaboration, and excavate my own practice as a collaborative theatre-maker, identifying a series of 'selves' at work in my practice.

Section 3 asks "How does my practice of collaborative theatre-making create a space for teaching and learning? Why?". I identify ten different types of teaching and learning which can be identified in the *FrontLines* Project. Then, I posit a theoretical understanding of why this teaching and learning took place in the project, using a Vygotskian model.

In so doing, I conceive of my collaborative theatre-making practice as a complex Zone of Proximal Development, in which we can grow and develop as collaborators and co-constructors of meaning, as both knower and learner, teacher and student, leader and follower, more capable peer and less capable peer, thinker and doer. In this way the process of collaborative theatre-making becomes a developmental process in which affective skills, critical thinking skills, communication skills, creative skills, and cognitive skills are grown and expanded.

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## DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated, with all my love, to my three boys:

My husband Johan, my rock and my best friend, never wavering in your love for me, and your belief in my talents.

And my sons,

Ben, my brilliant boy who is so like me in every way. You will be glad to know that I will not be living in the attic forever!

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Christian, whose arrival in the world somewhat delayed this study, but who has brought me more joy and sunshine than I could ever imagine

I love you all, with all of my heart.

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## *List of Abbreviations*

<b>ANC</b>	:	African National Congress
<b>BA</b>	:	Bachelor of Arts
<b>BA (Hons)</b>	:	Bachelor of Arts (Honours)
<b>DUT</b>	:	Durban University of Technology
<b>MA</b>	:	Master of Arts
<b>NAPAC</b>	:	Natal Performing Arts Council
<b>RSI</b>	:	Reciprocal Self Interview
<b>TEFL</b>	:	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
<b>UK</b>	:	United Kingdom
<b>UKZN</b>	:	University of KwaZulu-Natal
<b>UniZul</b>	:	University of Zululand
<b>UP</b>	:	University of Pretoria
<b>ZPD</b>	:	Zone of Proximal Development

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*"The theatre has been good to me. It has produced great friendships, love, travel, hard work, fun, terror and pleasure. It has also offered an entire life of study." (Bogart, 2001, p. 1)*

### Prologue

This study sets out to investigate my own practice of collaborative theatre-making, in order to gain a greater understanding of the educational implications of my work as director, theatre-maker, and educator. I have been involved for some years in a long-term, scholarly, creative, and pedagogical partnership with a colleague, Tamar Meskin. In over 10 years of working together, and in collaboration, we have written and published a number of scholarly papers, co-directed five scripted 'classical' plays, and co-created what has come to be called the *FrontLines* Project, with a group of students from both the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) and Durban University of Technology (DUT). The *Frontlines* Project examines conflict in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, and is based on letters, personal testimonies, eye witness reports, and original poetry. The project has had two evolutions directed by ourselves (2009, 2010), one evolution where we collaborated with a Durban-based theatre professional, called *FrontLines: The Remix* (2010), and a fourth evolution which included staff and students of the University of Pretoria (2011). The *FrontLines* Project will constitute the focal case-study of this thesis.

This study aims to tease out the how and the why of my collaborative theatre-making practice, in order to understand the assumptions, intentions, ideologies and meanings that inform my practice. What do I mean by practice? Stefinee Pinnegar and Mary Lynn Hamilton provide a useful definition that encompasses the meanings that I ascribe to this notion:

Practice is the activity or activities engaged in by a person in a particular profession or as an artist or craftsperson. Practice is a word attached to the work someone does in a particular role whether that role be personal, professional, or artistic... It includes the responsibilities, beliefs, and knowledge that informs and shapes that practice. When artists paint or musicians sing or dancers dance they engage in their practice as an artist. When doctors, lawyers, or teachers complete their schooling, they begin to practice law, medicine, or education.... practice then involves engaging with others in ways that lead to the accomplishment of goals through the use of knowledge, theories and understandings. (2010, pp. 15-16)

Thus, it is my contention that in undertaking my collaborative theatre-making practice, I am enacting and embodying my values, my ideological positions, my varied theoretical and practical knowledge(s), and my pedagogical philosophy, in multi-layered and complex processes of learning and teaching, both between myself and my collaborator(s), and between us and the students with whom we work.

In speaking of collaborative theatre-making, I am discussing a particular type of collaborative theatre work, where the performance is co-created through a process of devising and improvisation, under the leadership of one or more directors. In their seminal text, *Devising Performance: a critical history*, Deidre Heddon and Jane Milling attempt to define this type of theatrical endeavour:

Devising is variously: a social expression of non-hierarchical possibilities; a model of cooperative and non-hierarchical collaboration; an ensemble; a collective; a practical expression of political and ideological commitment; a means of taking control of work and operating autonomously; a de-commodification of art; a commitment to total community; a commitment to total art; the negating of the gap between art and life; the erasure of the gap between spectator and performer; a distrust of words; the embodiment of the death of the author; a means to reflect contemporary social reality; a means to incite social change; an escape from theatrical conventions; a challenge for theatre makers; a challenge

for spectators; an expressive, creative language; innovative; risky; inventive; spontaneous; experimental; non-literary. (2006, pp. 4-5)

My own practice of collaborative theatre-making encompasses many of these aspects of devised work, with the added imperative that it takes place within an educational context.

Thus, in this study I seek to gain a deeper understanding of how I collaborate with others, why our collaborations work in the way that they do, and what is happening under the surface of that collaboration. In so doing, I hope to be able to provide an understanding of how collaborative work can create a space for teaching and learning, functioning as a dialogic, constructivist pedagogy. It is my belief that the act of collaborative theatre-making destabilises the traditional power relationship between director/ actor, lecturer/student, and opens up new pathways for empowering students.

### *‘Theatre is a collaborative art’*

I have a clear memory of myself as a first year Drama student at the University of Natal (Durban)<sup>1</sup>, in the early 1990s; an outwardly confident, but inwardly insecure and shy 17-year-old, who felt that she couldn’t possibly be a real Drama student, because she could never be talented enough or special enough to belong in this amazing place. Much of that first year is a blur now, but one of the things that has stayed with me is the lecture where the Head of Department at the time, Professor Pieter Scholtz stood on the stage in Studio

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<sup>1</sup> As it was known then, in the early 1990s, prior to the creation of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, which resulted from the merger of the University of Natal and the University of Durban-Westville, in 2004.

5<sup>2</sup>, and declared in his distinctive deep and resonant voice “Theatre is a collaborative art. Painters can paint alone, singers and musicians can make music alone, but in the theatre, we cannot work alone – there is always a group of people who make a work of theatre, and we always need an audience to witness our work”<sup>3</sup>.

Of course, Professor Scholtz was not saying anything especially new or profound, but was rather stating a fact – there simply is no way for anyone to make theatre on their own. Even if one person were to write, direct, act in, design, perform, and market their own one-person show (which often happens in these days of limited monetary support for the arts) they would still need others to help them – someone to tear the tickets at the door, someone to operate the lighting and sound systems, someone to call the cues. There is no ‘alone’ work in the theatre; we are always working with and through the work of others in a complex network of artists and technicians who collaborate to create a living, breathing performance that exists only in the immediate moment of ‘liveness’<sup>4</sup> in front of an audience. As Robert Cohen points out

What theatre has retained from those centuries in which it was largely a family business is that its best artistic work almost always comes out of well-tuned *working relationships*. These need not be social relationships, but they are personal, and they are equally and even more intense than social relationships because they are fiercely dedicated to achieving specific artistic goals,

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<sup>2</sup> Studio 5 is a small, proscenium arch- style theatre space in the Drama and Performance Studies Department at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Howard College campus, which is used both for student performances and as a teaching venue.

<sup>3</sup> Of course, since this was over 25 years ago, I cannot remember his exact words, but the truth of his statement has stayed with me.

<sup>4</sup> This term is used widely in Performance Studies discourses to talk about the unique nature of theatrical performance which exists always only in the actual moment of its being carried out in front of an audience.

maintaining clear and honest communications, and aimed at a wholly integrated collaboration. (2011, p. 11)

However, because collaboration lies at the very heart of what we do in the theatre, because it is such a basic and integral part of the making of theatre, it is seldom considered as a phenomenon which can and should be studied and explored, in order to understand how and why it works. While there is much current literature which deals with collaboration in the theatre, this tends to deal mainly with the various roles of the different people who make up a production team, or else offer a “how to” approach to the collaborative process, with very little theoretical engagement with and interrogation of the collaborative process, especially in directing (Knopf, 2017; Cohen, 2011; Roznowski & Domer, 2009).

One area of scholarship in theatre which does deal to some extent with the nature of collaborative work is the field of Applied Theatre. In this form (or forms, as the term Applied Theatre can be used as an umbrella to cover a wide range of theatrical approaches), the notion of collaboration with the target community lies at the heart of what many practitioners set out to do (Prentki & Preston, 2009, Nicholson, 2005). However, the field of Applied Theatre does not adequately grapple with the particular type of collaborative theatre-making that I wish to examine.

Traditionally the director is usually one person, who has overall creative and organisational control over the production process.; the director works in collaboration with a team of people including actors, set and costume designers and makers, musicians, lighting and sound designers and technicians, stage managers, and many others. All of these people work collaboratively, but all in the service of the director’s singular vision; they work to bring his idea of the play to light. Of course, many of the truly great directors understand that their work can only be as good as their skills at collaboration, and build around them teams of people with whom they work for years, developing a way of working that is unique to their group. Examples of these might be Peter Brook and his Centre for International Theatre Research, Jerzy Grotowski and his Polish Theatre Laboratory, Ariane Mnouchine and

Théâtre du Soleil (Innes, 1993); Lev Dodin and the Maly Drama Theatre; Declan Donnellan, with his partner and collaborator Nick Omerod and their company Cheek by Jowl; Elizabeth LeCompte and the Wooster Group; Simon McBurney and Theatre de Complicité; and Max Stafford-Clark, and his work with writers and companies at the Royal Court Theatre (Shepherd, 2009; Shevtsova & Innes, 2009). In South Africa, collaborative theatre-making has a particularly politicised history, in the form of the Workshop Theatre of the 1970s and 1980s. This type of theatre is generally characterised by a strong collaborative vision of the participants, based largely on the desire to create a non-racial theatre, a theatre that defied the laws of Apartheid South Africa, and which was “free and fearless” (Fugard, in Stephanou & Henriques, 2005, p21). This theatre worked largely in terms of shared experiences, common aim, and communal spirit. Artists such as Athol Fugard, working with John Kani and Winston Ntshona (Fugard, 1983; Orkin, 1991), Barney Simon (Stephanou & Henriques, 2005), Gibson Kente, and Mbongeni Ngema (Coplan, 2007), articulate and use the principles and methods of collaborative endeavour. However, in all of the above cases, while these directors and companies may speak a discourse of collaborative endeavour, in many cases their actual working processes still reflect a singular directorial or artistic vision.

The question of what it means to be truly collaborative in one’s approach, the range of different types of collaboration, and the deep seated workings of the collaborative act, are rarely discussed or studied, particularly in the case of two or more directors working collaboratively on a performance project. Rarely has the notion of collaborators at directorial level been explored, perhaps because this has not been a common occurrence. Co-directors as co-creators with cast and crew is not a phenomenon that aligns to the modernist/ traditional view of the director as the one who ‘owns’ the work. The practice of co-directing, where ownership of the created work is shared, is far more in keeping with the collaborative and postmodern spirit of the twenty first century. This study therefore takes the notion of collaboration in the theatre as its inception point, and seeks to understand and explore the ways in which collaboration plays out in my own work with co-directors, collaborators, and students.



The study sets out to answer the following key questions:

- How do I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice? (with specific reference to the *FrontLines* Project)
- Who am I as a collaborative theatre-maker?
- How does my practice of collaborative theatre-making create a space for teaching and learning? Why?

I have chosen in this study to answer my key research questions through the use of self-study. Hamilton and Pinnegar define self-study as

the study of one's self, one's actions, one's ideas, as well as the 'not self'. It is autobiographical, historical, cultural, and political ... it draws on one's life, but it is more than that. Self-study also involves a thoughtful look at texts read, experiences had, people known, and ideas considered. (Hamilton & Pinnegar, 1998, p. 236)

In my opinion, this implies the researcher's engagement with both the ontological and epistemological aspects of the self-in-action. As Pinnegar and Hamilton also point out "Self-study is a stance towards understanding the world." (2010, p. v). Within the realm of qualitative research, self-study lies at the intersection of a number of different paradigms and theoretical positions, thus "Self-study exists, then, at the intersection between theory and practice, research and pedagogy." (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 827). In fact, it may be said that it occupies a position that is multi-paradigmatic, and cross-disciplinary, both methodological and theoretical.

In her discussion of self-study as a research method, Anastasia Samaras reminds the researcher that "teacher inquiry begins with you" (2011, p. 4). In seeking to understand my own practice through an examination of *what* I do, *how* I do it, and *why*, I make use of a 'personal history self-study' (Samaras, Hicks, & Garvey Berger, 2007). In telling the story of

my practice, I am able to “begin to develop an awareness of [my] development as a teacher and what current beliefs and values [I] bring into [my] practice” (Samaras, 2011, p. 95). Thus, my study has to begin at the beginning of my journey; in order to understand who I *am*, and what I *do* as a collaborative theatre-maker, I first need to gain a sense of *how* I came to be a collaborative theatre-maker. This is the first part of my on-going personal history narrative, that will thread its way all through this thesis, as I seek to “disrobe, unveil, and engage in soul-searching truth about the self *while also* engaging in critical conversations” (their emphasis) (Samaras, Hicks, & Garvey Berger, 2007).

### *From a bee, to a FrontLiner*



*Figure 1: Me, aged about 5, as a bee.*

I have loved the theatre for as long as I can remember. My career on and off the stage began early – my first ballet concert must have been at the age of about four or five. I was a bee; my mother made my costume, and I remember her painstakingly painting my ‘honey’ bucket and making my antennae. The ballet we presented was “Jack and the Beanstalk”,

and in the manner of ballet studios all over the world, each class or group portrayed a different animal or creature in the story. My abiding memory of this performance is not of being on the stage at all. Rather, I remember vividly, standing in the wings and watching the spectacle of the Giant (probably played by a tall man, who looked, to my childish eyes, so very giant-like) walk onto stage, and wondering to myself how this magic was being made before my very eyes. To this day, I retain this sense of fascination with the how and the why, the secrets behind the magic of theatre-making.

My childhood encompassed ballet and tap lessons, speech and drama lessons, singing in the choir, and a number of school plays. I loved performing, loved the stage, loved the energy of making something for an audience. By the time I went to High school at a prestigious private girls' school high on Durban's Berea, my love of theatre and drama was an integral part of me. At this school, I loved our more formal drama lessons, and took an active part in the school's extensive Arts programme of dance dramas, inter-house duologues, and inter-house one-act plays. By the time I reached Standard 7 (now called Grade 9), I was determined that I would choose Speech and Drama as one of the subjects I would take through to my Matric year<sup>5</sup>.

However, fate intervened when my father's job was transferred to Benoni, close to Johannesburg. At the end of my Standard 7 (Grade 9) year, we moved, and I was enrolled in

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<sup>5</sup> At the time, South African schools ran from Grade 1 (at age 6), through to Grade 3 in Junior Primary school (now called the Foundation Phase), and then continued in the Senior Primary with Standards 1-5 (now called Grade 4-7). High school encompassed Standards 6 – 10 (now called Grade 8 – 12). The final year of schooling was commonly called the Matric year (this term is still commonly in use), as pupils wrote the Matriculation examination at the end of it, which would determine their path into higher education through University, Technikon, and Technical Colleges, depending on the results earned in those final exams. Learners choose a minimum of 6 subjects from Standard 8 / Grade 10, and take only these through to their final exams.

a private Catholic girl's school. This school did not offer Speech and Drama as a formal school subject, and so I opted to take French instead. Again, I threw myself into the cultural life of the school, joining the choir and auditioning for the annual school plays. Quickly I gained a reputation as 'a good actress', and was given a range of challenging roles, such as playing a series of Shakespeare's heroines and Helen Keller (complete with a vocal persona adopted to suit the fact that she was deaf) in a variety programme, and one of the brothers, Zebulon, in the school's production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*.

Even at this stage of my education, I had a clear sense that I wanted to study Drama, and make theatre for a living. At the National Schools' Festival in Grahamstown in my final year at school, I saw a performance of Martinus Basson's production of Heiner Muller's *Macbeth*, and can remember walking out and saying "That's what I want to do with my life!". I talked to my parents about this and they, probably fearful of how I would make a living in this notoriously difficult profession, urged me to try to study something more 'useful' like Journalism, which would make good use of my natural aptitude for writing, and my love of the English language. By the time my Matric year was ending, I had been accepted at University to study a BA, majoring in English and Drama, with the intention of becoming a journalist when I graduated.

At University, I felt truly at home for the first time in my life; I revelled in the freedom that University granted me, and the space I was being given to learn as much as possible about as many different things as possible. Even now, I look back on that time with such joy. In the Drama Department, despite my initial feelings that I didn't belong there, I found a real sense of creative possibility. My closest friends<sup>6</sup> were also studying Drama, and we spent almost all of our time in the department, working on productions and trying to learn everything we could about the theatre.

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<sup>6</sup> These women are still some of my closest friends, testament to the nature of the bonds we made during those days of studying together.

It was, however, during these years of undergraduate study that I began to shift my focus away from being a performer. Perhaps because of the feeling of 'impostor syndrome' (Clance & Imes, 1978), the lingering feeling that I might not deserve to be a Drama student, I began to have quite crippling stage fright during my student years, something that had never been a problem for me before. I found auditioning and performing difficult, but quickly found a way to stay in my beloved theatre, while not being on the stage; I learnt how to be a Stage Manager. After my first experience of Stage Managing *Fiddler on the Roof* during my second year of study, I quickly found that I had a knack for this very difficult job, which meant that I was often asked to Stage Manage a wide range of productions in the department, and later in small scale theatres around Durban. Through my time backstage, I also picked up some lighting and sound skills, which have proved very useful over the years. At the end of my third year of study, I was invited to register for my BA Honours degree in Drama the following year. By this time I think my parents had resigned themselves to the reality that I was never going to be a journalist<sup>7</sup>, and with their blessing I eagerly signed up for another year of study.

It was during this Honours year, in a class of 6 girls, many of them my dearest friends, that I really began to understand the collaborative nature of theatre. Like many theatre companies of the past, we spent every waking moment together during that year, our energies utterly focused on our work at University, and our leisure time was spent together too. Our academic tasks for the year included a number of seminars which we had to prepare and present to our classmates, as well as a number of productions in which we

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<sup>7</sup> A short-lived stint as a student journalist in the early 1990's, at the height of the waves of violence spreading through the townships of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, had quickly shown me that I simply did not have the temperament to be a news journalist.

performed. The biggest challenge, however, lay in our 'Directing projects'; we each had to direct a one-act play to be presented in the Square Space Theatre<sup>8</sup>.

In directing these productions, we relied very heavily on each other as a tight-knit group; we performed in each other's plays, helped to design and construct sets, worked on posters and publicity, manned the door, and helped each other with lighting and sound. My friends often called upon the knowledge I had gained working backstage on so many productions, and I was often asked to help with operating lighting or sound, or to Stage Manage productions, even when I was also performing in them. Looking back, I see now how formative this was in terms of my practice; to me, the idea of working together with my peers has always seemed instinctive and utterly natural, and when I entered the world of professional theatre the following year, I found its time-honoured hierarchies difficult to swallow (perhaps another reason why I prefer to work collaboratively, in a fairly non-hierarchical way).

The low point for me of that Honours year was probably my own directing project. I was pretty certain by this time that I wanted to direct, and had volunteered to take on the task of directing the department's entry to the National Arts Festival's Student Festival<sup>9</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> The Square Space Theatre is a small, flexible studio-style theatre on the UKZN Howard College campus.

<sup>9</sup> Held in Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape in early July each year, the National Arts Festival is one of the biggest in the world, and encompasses the full range of artistic forms. It is attended by artists from all over South Africa, and from outside our borders. For many years, an integral part of this Festival was the Student Festival, featuring work by students from all the Drama departments at all the Universities in the country. These productions were funded by money from the Grahamstown Foundation, which administers and organizes the festival. In recent years, this pattern has changed due to funding constraints, which has seen Universities being asked to self-fund their participation, which has resulted in many departments being unable to mount a production at all.

However, the actual experience proved to be a difficult one; we were all exhausted by the many hours of work that the course demanded, and were also beginning to tire of spending all our time together. What we needed was a break from each other's company, but instead were placed in the position of having to workshop a production in very little time, after our early efforts at putting together a script had been rejected by the department staff. Under this kind of pressure, any interpersonal issues we had were magnified, resulting in a very unhappy rehearsal period. As a novice director, navigating these inter-personal dynamics was a minefield, and I felt completely out of my depth. The resulting work was not up to our usual high standard, and the response of critics at the Festival was harsh, and deeply wounding. I felt that I had failed my classmates, by not being able to guide them to a better performance. I returned from the festival convinced that I could not direct, and that I would be better off pursuing a career behind the scenes as a stage manager. It would be 5 years before I was really confident enough to attempt to direct again.

At the end of my year of Honours year of study, my classmates and I auditioned for the Natal Performing Arts Council (NAPAC)<sup>10</sup>. While my audition was not successful, a chance conversation outside the audition venue led to my being offered a job as an ad-hoc stage manager at the Natal Playhouse, NAPAC's iconic multi-venue home in the middle of downtown Durban. During the year that followed, 1994, I worked on shows in almost all of the Playhouse's different theatrical venues. My job, as a stage manager at a hiring house like the Playhouse, was to help get the show in to the venue, and then learn the lighting and

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<sup>10</sup> The four Performing Arts Councils were relics of the Apartheid era, where they were government-funded, and largely aimed to presenting 'High Culture' to White South Africans. They mostly consisted of permanent Opera, Ballet and Drama companies, as well as, in some cases, orchestras and educational theatre companies (NAPAC included all of these, at the time that I was first employed by them). These Arts Councils all had permanent homes in large, multi-venue structures, equipped with the best theatre and stage technology money could buy. At the advent of a democratic South Africa in 1994, the Arts Councils were disbanded, although their successors such as the Playhouse Company in Durban still benefit from a large government subsidy.

sound cues as quickly as possible. While I enjoyed the work, I desperately missed the sense of creative engagement that came with watching a production evolve in the rehearsal room. There were only two shows that year which allowed me to work in the rehearsal room with the director, and these stood out as highlights for me. Both productions were part of the repertoire of the Loft Schools' Company (NAPAC's Educational Theatre company), and in these rehearsals I was given the space and the opportunity to work as part of a team of my peers, with both the actors and the director asking for my ideas and my creative input into the process.

In the following year, after the Loft Schools' Company was disbanded as part of the sweeping changes instituted by the newly-minted ANC-led government, which turned the Natal Performing Arts Council into The Playhouse Company, I was given to opportunity to join its replacement, the Playhouse Puppet Company. While I found this to be a more creative and collaborative environment, my stay at the company was short-lived. Due to changes in my personal life, in the April of 1995 I resigned from the Playhouse, and set off for Grahamstown in the Eastern Cape. My intention was to enrol at Rhodes University to study towards an MA in Drama, specialising in Directing.

I spent almost three years in Grahamstown, and in many ways it is a very difficult period of my life to look back on. I could not register for my MA in the first year that I moved there, and so I had to find incidental work in the Drama Department of Rhodes University. Once again, my Stage Management experience came in handy, as I was able to work as a technician at the National Arts Festival, and was also asked by the Drama Department to help with Stage Managing a number of productions, for which I was paid a nominal fee. Despite this engagement with the department, I felt out of place in Grahamstown. I made few friends, and felt isolated and deeply lonely. This was also the first time I had lived away from my parents, and I was very homesick.



At the end of that first year, I formally applied to become part of the coursework MA programme, specializing in directing. While my application was accepted, I was told that the department, which was very much focused on Dance and Physical Theatre, would not offer a directing stream in the coursework programme, and so I had to accept that my MA would be by thesis only. This was a big disappointment, as I desperately wanted to engage with the practical part of the coursework programme, and mount my own production. When I became a registered student in the department, however, I felt a little more settled. I was joined in Grahamstown by a friend from my Undergraduate days, who was enrolled in the MA programme in Dance. We shared a house, and were able to support each other in adjusting to a very different environment from the one we were used to in Durban. We did make friends though, and gradually built up a small group of like-minded fellow students and artists, with whom we began to work. We soon became part of an informal collective of dancers and choreographers, and presented work at the Grahamstown Festival, as well as at the Women's Arts Festival at the Playhouse in Durban. I found my technical expertise was once again in demand, as the choreographers relied on me to help them to achieve the technical aspects of their performances. I also spent time with my friends discussing and helping to clarify the conceptual and visual ideas for their pieces. It was during this period, at a meeting with the department's resident Designer, that I was asked if I was the 'director' for the dance works being presented, and I began to understand that what I was doing went beyond technical support, and placed me firmly within the role of a collaborator in the choreographic process.

At the same time, I also worked as a Stage Manager for the First Physical Theatre Company, who are based out of the Rhodes University Drama Department. Led by Prof Gary Gordon, the company were in the process of re-imagining South African choreography (Sassen, 2015). I had seen them perform at the National Arts Festival when I was there as a student, and had been completely blown away by their work, which was unlike anything I had ever seen before. When I moved to Grahamstown, one of my dearest hopes was to be able to work with them in some way, to try to understand the process behind making their work. Once again, my experience as a Stage Manager opened another door for me, as I was offered the opportunity to work with them on a number of different pieces, my favourite of

which was *The Unspeakable Story* (1995). My experience with the company was a valuable one; while I never became a part of the creative process, as I so dearly wanted, I was able to observe Prof Gordon and the other choreographers at work, and learnt an enormous amount about contemporary dance, and the ways in which a physical theatre piece is conceptualized and realized in action.

In my third year in Grahamstown, just as I was preparing to finish my MA thesis on the work of British director, Peter Brook<sup>11</sup>, my long-term romantic relationship came to an end, and I returned home to my parents, nursing a broken heart. I finished my thesis, and graduated *in absentia*, vowing never to go back. For many years I looked at my time in Grahamstown as one of the worst periods of my life, but looking at it now, from the distance of 20 years, I can see that it was not all bad. I was isolated, and felt like I did not fit in, but I learnt an enormous amount in that time, and it stretched me both intellectually and creatively in ways that would not have happened had I stayed in Durban for that period.

I must have done something right during my time at Rhodes, however, because shortly after I had submitted my thesis, I was contacted by the Drama Department at the University of Zululand (UniZul); they were looking for a lecturer, and had been given my name and a recommendation by the staff at Rhodes. In the space of a month or so, I had driven up north of Durban to Empangeni for an interview, accepted the job, and found myself a flat to live in close to the University campus. My career as an academic had begun, almost without my realizing it.

I only spent one year at UniZul, but it was a very significant one, both personally and professionally. On a personal level, and quite ironically considering my broken-hearted state

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<sup>11</sup> My thesis is entitled “Towards a culture of links: myth and ritual in the work of Peter Brook”.

at the time, in my first week there I met the man who would later become my husband. On a professional level, it was my first real experience of teaching, and it was a baptism of fire! Having always sworn that I would never be a teacher, I found myself being thrown into the deep end, teaching a large lecture load to students who in some cases could barely speak or understand English. Situated deep in the former homeland of KwaZulu, the students I was teaching came from the rural communities around Nongoma, Nkandla, and Ulundi, and mostly came from very traditional Zulu backgrounds. For many of them, English was their third or fourth language, and many of my students admitted that their lecturers were the first White people they had ever spoken to. They were generally very talented performers, steeped in traditional performance forms, but with almost no previous exposure to Western Theatre forms. As a novice teacher, this was a terrifying place to learn my craft, but also a fruitful one. I have always said that I learned here the art of explaining one idea in six different ways, as I never knew which approach would work for the students in my class. I found, working at UniZul, that I loved to teach; I loved connecting with my students, who were mostly highly motivated and eager to learn. My classroom was often the site of heated debate and much discussion, as students grappled for the first time with ideas around gender equality, feminism, and postmodernism.

At UniZul, I also met and became friends with Marié-Heleen Coetzee, then a Junior Lecturer completing her BA Hons, and now a Professor widely respected in her field. Marié-Heleen and I have not only been friends for many years now, but she was one of the first people that I collaborated with in a structured way on a production. During my year there, I decided that I would like to direct Ntozake Shange's *For Colored Girls who have Considered Suicide when the Rainbow is Enuf*. This was a contentious choice, given that the cast consists entirely of women; at UniZul, where traditional values still held sway, this was seen by many male students as problematic, and I was actually summoned to a meeting with male students to explain my choice! Shange describes the play, written entirely in verse, as a 'choreopoem', and stresses that the patterns of movement and dance that accompany the spoken text are of intrinsic importance in the play. While I did not feel confident enough to choreograph this on my own, I felt that Marié-Heleen's expertise in dance and movement

would add an enormous amount to the success of the production. I approached her to work with me on the piece, and we have been friends and collaborators ever since.

At the end of that year, I was informed that my contract was not going to be renewed by the University, due to a drop in student numbers<sup>12</sup>. Faced with the question of what to do now, and encouraged by my parents, I decided to take some time off to travel to the UK on a 'working holiday' visa<sup>13</sup>. I had friends already in England who I could share a house with, and following their advice, I brushed up on my secretarial skills, and qualified to teach English as a foreign language (TEFL) before I left South Africa. One thing I was certain of when I left was that I had no intention of trying to work in theatre in the UK; my knowledge of some of my peers' experiences of the harshness and the difficulties of trying to break into the world of theatre in England were enough to persuade me that I was not prepared to face that kind of heartbreak.

Looking back now, I can see that this was a good decision on a number of levels. Working in the corporate sector taught me a wide range of skills that have proved to be useful to me both in my career as an academic, and in my personal life. The experience of looking after myself in a foreign country, and making a life for myself far from my family and all my 'safely nets' was enormously empowering, and allowed me the space to finally grow up in a way that I might not have done if I had stayed in South Africa. In addition, while I did not work in theatre, I spent almost all of my leisure time soaking up as much theatre as I could in London; I saw a huge range of productions, from West End musicals to experimental works presented in cavernous basement spaces and out-of-the-way theatres.

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<sup>12</sup> In fact, student numbers in the department declined so sharply during the late 1990s, that the Department itself was quite soon after this subsumed into a broader Creative Arts programme.

<sup>13</sup> This visa, available to citizens of Commonwealth countries, allows one to be resident in the UK for two years, and to work while you are there.

The 18 months I spent in London allowed me to become an avid *watcher* of theatre, and I am aware now that I learnt an enormous amount during that time that has become integrated into my own theatrical practice.

During my time in the UK, I also expanded my experience as a teacher. Using my TEFL qualification, I worked for a period during my evenings, teaching English to a mixed group of foreign students at a language school just off the Tottenham Court Road. Once again, this felt like a baptism of fire; my class was made up of people about my age, from countries including Chile, Peru, Poland, Korea, and Japan (and these are only the countries I can remember!) who were mostly in the UK on student visas. Trying to teach such a mixed bag of students was challenging to say the least, but I enjoyed it enormously, and I have always felt that it contributed a great deal to my development as a teacher.

Later in that year, I also went to Poland to teach English for about 6 weeks, at a summer school in a small town called Tarnów, South East of Krakow. Here, my students ranged from school pupils to business women, and once again the challenge of teaching a language that was foreign to my students was huge. In many ways, this was even harder than teaching in London, because my Polish students had few opportunities to use their English and practice the skills they were learning, unlike my London students who were all working and living in an English-speaking country.

While I was in Poland, I also visited a place that changed me in a very profound way, and that visit continues to influence my work to this day; I went to Auschwitz-Birkenau, the most infamous of all the Nazi death camps, in the Southern Polish town of Oswiecim. Even now, so many years later, I find it hard to really describe the experience adequately. I went to Auschwitz on my own, and my clearest memories are of sitting on the floor, weeping, faced with rooms full of human hair, shoes, suitcases, spectacles, toothbrushes, and all the accumulated debris of over a million lives snuffed out. My journal entry from that day reveals the impact of what I saw:

In the museum, the photographs, everywhere, the SS documents of their own crimes. The urn of human ashes, collected at Birkenau – how many people are mixed up together in there? How many lives, memories, loves, sunny days, and tears does that urn hold?

I walked into a room, and one whole side of the room, glassed in, filled with hair – human hair, shorn from the heads of prisoners, to be used for mattresses, or to line a jacket in soft cloth. I wanted to be sick, felt that there was not enough air in the room. Tried to breathe against the panic of knowing that each of these women were dead. The hair, old, matted, knotted with time, grey too, in an indistinct way, as if blurred by the 50 years that have passed... In the next house - prayer shawls and a tangle of glasses. Old fashioned monocles, the glass crushed.

Upstairs, the hopes of a new life that instead led to death. Each suitcase bears a name – where are all these people now? The pots and pans – rusted with age. Toothbrushes bearing the impression of mouths long dead. Hairbrushes, clothes brushes – millions of them in a mountain behind the glass.

And the shoes. Oh God, the shoes. I felt as if someone had struck my heart. So many pairs of shoes – a whole room full of them. The absolute desolation, the emptiness of dead men and women's shoes. Children's shoes too. (Personal journal. 18 July 1999)

I also remember the vastness of the Birkenau camp – over 1.5 million people died there alone - and the terrible silence of the summer afternoon while I walked among the ruins of the camp. There were wildflowers everywhere, growing from the soil that was fertilized by the ashes of those killed in this terrible place.

A guide explains that at Birkenau, you can still pick up a handful of earth, and find it studded with pieces of human bone. The earth simply cannot absorb so much death.

Birkenau – so big it exceeds comprehension. The sick inevitability of the railway line that goes in through the gate, and never comes out. The fields of

wildflowers, studded by ruined hearths and chimneys, stretching to the trees, where the crematoria lie mined. Here, they killed 1 500 000 people.

The desolation of the place – it is haunted by millions of ghosts. I have never been to such an eerie place. Hot, and too quiet, and vast. And such wildflowers, fertilized by the dead.

A sense that the dead are close around you there, in the stillness of the place... At the end of the railway tracks, in the space where those millions saw their last glimpses of sky and trees and earth, a memorial. Let us not forget. (Personal journal. 18 July 1999.)

When I returned to Tarnów, to my small apartment, I could not sleep for days, as my mind and my heart sought to process what I had seen and felt. Certainly my visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau had a direct influence on the making of the *FrontLines* Project ten years later; the motifs of shoes and railway lines were recurring images in the production and they can be traced directly to my memories of that terrible place.

On my return to South Africa at the end of 2000, I found a temporary job working as a personal assistant at Toyota's huge manufacturing plant in the Durban South industrial area. I have never felt more like a fish out of water! Out for drinks one evening, I bumped into an old friend from University, who was playing a role in Greig Coetzee's new play *Seeing Red*, at the Playhouse in Durban. She mentioned that they were looking for a Stage Manager to help them when they took the production to the National Arts Festival in Grahamstown about a month later, and asked if I might be interested. I leapt at the chance! After the festival, I returned to Durban and contacted the then Head of the Drama Department at the University, Professor Mervyn McMurtry, to ask if he had any teaching opportunities available. Within a few weeks I was tutoring on a number of courses, teaching practical classes to small groups of students. I was also offered a position as a trainer for a company offering speech, language, and image training for the corporate sector.

The five years that followed this proved to be some of the busiest and most stressful of my life. In 2002 I married, and also took on a bigger teaching load at the University. In addition, I was asked to come on board as Festival Manager for the Jomba! Contemporary Dance Festival mounted by the Centre for Creative Arts at the University, a role I filled for five years. This was all in addition to the corporate training work that I was still doing, on a more and more permanent basis.

The following year, Prof McMurtry called me in early February, to ask if I would be interested in doing some teaching in the Education Faculty; following the merger of the Edgewood College of Education into the University of KwaZulu-Natal, as part of the larger restructuring and merging of higher education institutions that was underway across the country at the time, the incumbent Drama lecturer had left suddenly, and the faculty needed a replacement as a matter of urgency. I agreed to start immediately, but was dismayed to discover that the previous incumbent had left with all her notes, module plans and resources. I was literally going to have to start from scratch! Having never worked in teacher education before, this was a daunting task. I needed to equip students with both the content knowledge to enable them to teach Drama as a subject in the school curriculum, and the methodological skills to use drama as a means of teaching in a wide range of classroom situations. I immediately turned to Prof McMurtry and other colleagues in the Drama department for help, and aided by their expertise and experience, I sat down that weekend and drew up an entire programme for all four years of study in Drama Education, which students could choose as a specialist teaching area.

Looking back now, I am struck by how brave (and probably stupid, too) I was; I think if I was faced with the same task today, I would run a mile. Partly, my bravery was due to the fact that I really didn't have any idea about curriculum development and the many issues one has to take into account when designing a learning programme. I simply looked at the school curriculum, decided what I thought the students would need to know in order to teach that curriculum, and worked backwards from there. Naturally, there were numerous problems with what I had put together, and it all had to be refined and reworked as



experience taught me what worked and what didn't. The 'method' courses, which dealt with using Drama as a teaching methodology were the most difficult for me, as I had no formal training in teaching methods, and worked largely by instinct in the classroom. Designing and teaching these courses meant many late nights sitting and reading up material that I would need to teach the next day – it was a hand-to-mouth sort of existence, and I never felt confident in teaching the methodology sections of the course. I was very grateful to hand it over to the vastly more experienced and knowledgeable Lorraine Singh when she took up her post at the University as head of Drama Education later on.

One aspect of the curriculum that I was particularly concerned about in the Education faculty, was the lack of practical production work experience the students had. I immediately set out to remedy this situation, and in my years there I endeavoured to direct a production each year, in order for students to experience for themselves all the many aspects that go into mounting a production. I mostly directed Greek dramas or comedies, as they allowed me the flexibility of large casts, made up mostly of women (the overwhelming majority of my students!), and they suited a flexible and pared down playing style. The productions were done simply, with minimal props and basic costumes. The Drama Education programme had very few props and costumes at their disposal, and the studio space that we worked in was in desperate need of an overhaul of lighting and sound equipment. By borrowing from other sources, and by making use of my experience in such a range of theatrical disciplines, I was able to model for the students the kind of creative 'making a plan' that they would in all likelihood have to do within the school settings that they would work in.

In 2004, I was also contracted to the Drama and Performance Studies programme on the Howard College campus, to take over the workload of a staff member who had taken a lengthy sabbatical. It was somewhat daunting; despite the fact that I had taught practical classes on a number of the courses in the programme, I had not carried a full lecturing load before this, and I was still also teaching in the Education faculty. Thankfully, I had by this time left my corporate training work behind, as I simply didn't have the time, but my abiding

memory of that year is of spending an enormous amount of time in my car, shuttling between campuses.

In between my teaching commitments, I also managed to find time to write and direct a musical theatre piece based on the life of The Doors' Jim Morrison, which played to much critical acclaim at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. As with so many other projects in my career, this was also a collaboration between friends; a good friend who is a lighting designer had been toying with the idea of a show about The Doors for years, and asked me to come on board as the writer. Together, we conceptualized and crafted the show, and while I wrote the text and directed the piece, he designed the sets, lighting, and complicated montages of projected images against which the action of the piece played out. With a full live band, and a cast of one actor and two dancers, this was a huge undertaking, and we were all justifiably proud and delighted when the production was named 'Best Musical Theatre Production' at the annual Durban Theatre Awards later that year.

It was also in 2004 that my close friendship and collaborative working relationship with Tamar Meskin really began. While Tamar and I had known each other fairly casually before this, it was really during this year that our friendship flourished, and we got to know each other both personally and professionally on a much deeper level. Partly, this began because of Tamar's enormous intellectual generosity; as I said earlier, the task of taking on a full lecturing load in the Drama and Performance Studies programme was utterly daunting, but Tamar offered me her help right from the beginning. Our true friendship began because she was willing to let me bounce ideas off her, to lend me her lecture notes and her books to help me to develop my own lectures, and also because she almost immediately asked me to teach on some of her courses, to bring my own expertise to bear on what she was offering her students. This recognition that I had something valuable to add to her students' learning was enormously gratifying to me, as I still struggled with 'impostor syndrome', and the abiding feeling that I was not really good enough to be doing what I was doing. Later that year, Tamar asked me to direct a series of short plays as a project with her Third Year Acting specialization students. I was acutely aware of the fact that she had vastly more knowledge

and experience than I did in directing, and so to be asked to take on this project was a huge boost to my own confidence as a director.

In all of this sharing of ideas, over innumerable cups of tea, we discovered that we are, to use the Italian word, *SimpatICO*. While in Italian the word means likeable (Berlitz, 2009, p. p.462), in English it has come also “to describe the relationship between people who get along well or work well together”<sup>14</sup>. Over all those cups of tea, we found a sense of deep connection in terms of how we viewed the world, our roles as teachers, and our creative vision. It is this sense of shared values and vision that has informed and underpinned our collaboration ever since.

In 2005, I continued to work both in the Education faculty, and in the Drama and Performance Studies programme (albeit on a more part-time basis, as the staff member I had replaced the year before had returned from his sabbatical). At the time, Drama and Performance Studies ran an annual Shakespeare Festival, funded by First National Bank, which strove to make Shakespeare’s work accessible to a young, post-apartheid South African audience. The festival had two main parts; a full-scale production of one of Shakespeare’s plays, and a smaller Theatre in Education (TIE) project aimed at school learners. Tamar had been heavily involved with this festival for a number of years, having co-directed every one of the Shakespeare productions. In 2005, she asked me if I would come on board to help her to conceptualise and devise the TIE part of the festival, in conjunction with her and a group of third year students. The project, which looked at themes and ideas from Shakespeare’s *Macbeth*, was our first attempt at co-direction, and later became the subject of our first co-presented conference paper and our first published

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<sup>14</sup> Simpatico. (n.d.). Retrieved Feb 14, 2017 from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/simpatico>.

article (Meskin & van der Walt, 2007). Almost without realizing it, we had slipped into an artistic, creative, and scholarly partnership that has lasted ever since.

In 2006, while I was pregnant with my first child, Tamar and I co-directed Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* for the annual Shakespeare Festival, and our complimentary roles as co-directors began to be more clearly defined, as we gained a greater understanding of each other's strengths and weaknesses, and discovered the ways in which our ideas converged, and the ways in which they parted from each other. In many ways, this was the production that really sealed our directing partnership and our friendship, as she helped me get through many long rehearsals while suffering from debilitating morning sickness (a misnomer if ever there was one) that eventually landed me in hospital. It became apparent to me during that production that we were beginning to develop a way of thinking and doing together that was at times almost seamless, and this sense of us 'thinking with the same brain' has continued to grow and develop over the years we have worked together.

At the end of 2006, shortly before the birth of my son, I was told that my contract with the Education faculty would not be renewed for the following year. Once my son was born in December, I decided that I would largely take the next year off. In 2007, I taught a specialised course in Drama in Education for Drama and Performance Studies, as well as some practical classes, but found this very difficult with a new-born in tow. However, towards the end of that year, as my son neared his first birthday, I applied for and was offered a permanent post as a lecturer in the Drama Studies Department at Durban University of Technology (DUT)<sup>15</sup>. Almost as soon as I began to work there, I became aware of the yawning gap that existed between my students at DUT, and Tamar's students at UKZN. Despite the fact that they had so much in common, and would in all likelihood end up working together in the same small industry, the two groups of students had virtually no

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<sup>15</sup> Later on, I would be appointed as Head of Department for Drama Studies at DUT.

contact with each other; they never met, had no social interaction that we knew of, did not go and see each other's work, and generally seemed to view each other with distrust and a sense of competition. This bothered Tamar and I enormously; we had continued to work together and bounce ideas off each other, and even this seemed to be viewed with suspicion by our students, and in some cases by our colleagues as well. In a way, we were seen to be consorting with the enemy, a situation that seemed to us laughable, and completely counter-intuitive.

Nevertheless, we continued our work together, writing papers, presenting our ideas at conferences, and planning productions. In 2008, when I directed my first full-scale production at DUT, A.R. Gurney's *The Dining Room*, it was Tamar who had suggested the script to me. In that year we also mounted two professional productions outside of our work commitments, along with a small group of ex-students from UKZN who were now working as professional actors. It was also in 2008 that I encountered the book that would spark the idea for what would become the *FrontLines* Project. In December 2007, my parents had given my husband a book of reminiscences of the South African Border War<sup>16</sup>, entitled *An Unpopular War: from Afkak to Bosbepok* (Thompson, 2006). I picked the book up later in 2008, and read it voraciously – I found it extremely moving, and since it uses first-person narrative and testimony, almost immediately began to think about how I could use it to create a theatre piece. I told Tamar and Marié-Heleen Coetzee, who was in Durban for a conference at the time, about this idea and they both agreed that it had a lot of potential. At the time, however, I really wasn't sure how I would bring the stories from the book to the

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<sup>16</sup> Also known as the Namibian War of Independence, it lasted from roughly 1966 until its end in March 1990. Under the Apartheid government, White men were conscripted into the South African Defence Force, and deployed to the Northern parts of Namibia and Southern Angola in an ongoing military engagement. In post – apartheid South Africa, the war has become part of an almost-unspoken history, which belies the importance it holds in the memories of many White South Africans over a certain age, whose lives were deeply scarred by the war.

stage, and so the idea of the piece lingered in the back of my mind for a period of months, as I mulled it over.

In early 2009, Tamar and I sat down, as we do at the beginning of every year, to chat about what the year ahead held for us and what ideas we might have that we could work on together. At that juncture, we had decided to present work at a number of international conferences during the European summer, and part of our planning at that time centred around a trip to Europe in July/ August, to present papers at 3 separate conferences<sup>17</sup>. At the same time, we agreed that the time had come for us to try to bring our students together to work on a project together. We were determined to try to build a greater sense of community between the two groups of students, and we knew that the easiest and quickest way to do this was to bring them together to work on a practical performance project. At first we thought about tackling a scripted play, and looked around for ideas, but nothing seemed to suit our purpose and our student demographics at the time. It was at this point that Tamar suggested that we revisit my idea from the year before to tackle a piece about the Border War. We immediately began to brainstorm around this idea, and within weeks had expanded the scope of our idea to be a production that would deal with war and its consequences. The *FrontLines* journey had begun!

## *Conclusion*

In this chapter I have outlined the purpose and focus of the study and begun to share my personal history narrative. I also introduced some of the key concepts on which this research is based. Having discovered through reflection how I came to be a collaborator, I now need to grapple in greater detail with the ways in which I will go about answering my

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<sup>17</sup> A large part of the thinking and planning for the *FrontLines* Project took place during this trip.

critical questions using self-study. The following chapter will therefore examine the notion of self-study and reflexivity, as well as provide a detailed discussion of my data gathering and analysis methods. Before I unpack these, however I have inserted what I call a “methodological parenthesis” which elucidates one of the significant methods which I have employed in my research, and which provides some indication of the development of the research design.

## *A Methodological Parenthesis*

### *Mapping my emergent thinking*

One of the key methods I have used to develop and clarify my thinking throughout this study, is the spider diagram, concept map (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010) or mind-map© (Buzan, 2010). In creating a series of diagrams that trace the development of my thoughts and ideas through the many years of the growth of this thesis, I have found a way to visually connect the many ideas and insights I have gained. In discussing this kind of 'visual mapping', Toni Krasnic explains that

Visual mapping is known by many other names, most notable mind mapping©, but also concept mapping, flow-charting, visual thinking, spider diagramming, memory mapping, semantic mapping, and thought webbing. (Krasnic, 2010, p. 1)

The purpose of this kind of visual mapping is to create a graphic means of representing complex thought processes; it is a way of organising thoughts into maps that will allow you to draw connections and conclusions from your thinking in ways that may not have been possible until it was represented visually. Butler-Kisber and Poldma explain that

Concept maps allow the researcher to step outside the constraints of linear thinking and to engage in, and encourage the messy and nonlinear work of, the brain, and in so doing, to tease out ideas and connections in the data that might otherwise remain implicit. It is when these implicit thoughts become apparent that the analysis can be pushed to a deeper level. (2010, p. 9)

Thus, visual mapping operates as a meaning-making process that helps the researcher to make sense of their own thinking through visual means. Visual mapping can also help the reader to better understand the researcher's thinking processes. For this reason, I have decided to include these diagrams (some are mind-maps, some are spider diagrams, and some are rhizomatic concept maps), as a way to evidence and make transparent the development of my thinking, and I see them as '*artefacts of thinking*' that allow me to



organise and synthesise my ideas. As such, I use visual mapping to “demonstrate how experiential ways of knowing and understanding ... are a means of making tacit ideas explicit and make new insights possible for both the researcher and the research audience” (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010, p. 2). In some cases, the diagrams will be reproduced as ‘tidied up’ figures within the text, but in most cases I will simply include photographs or scanned copies of the original free-hand diagrams made in my research notebooks, in order to preserve the authenticity of my thinking in that particular moment.

Validity in self-study is achieved through meticulous detailing of the processes used to generate data and analysis, and a transparent “open, honest and clear description of the spiral of questioning, framing, revisiting of data, and reframing of researcher’s interpretations” (Samaras, 2011, p. 11). Visual mapping is one of the methods I have used to demonstrate what Mishler calls “the visibility of the work” (1990, p. 429). In this way, I am able to make plain the ways in which my thinking has developed, and the connections I have made between theory, data, and analysis. By making my thinking process visible, I am able to allow my reader to “see the study and the links and leaps made” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2010, p. 150).

As examples of this, I have included here the following *artefacts of thinking*, to illustrate the development of my thought process regarding how to go about structuring this thesis.

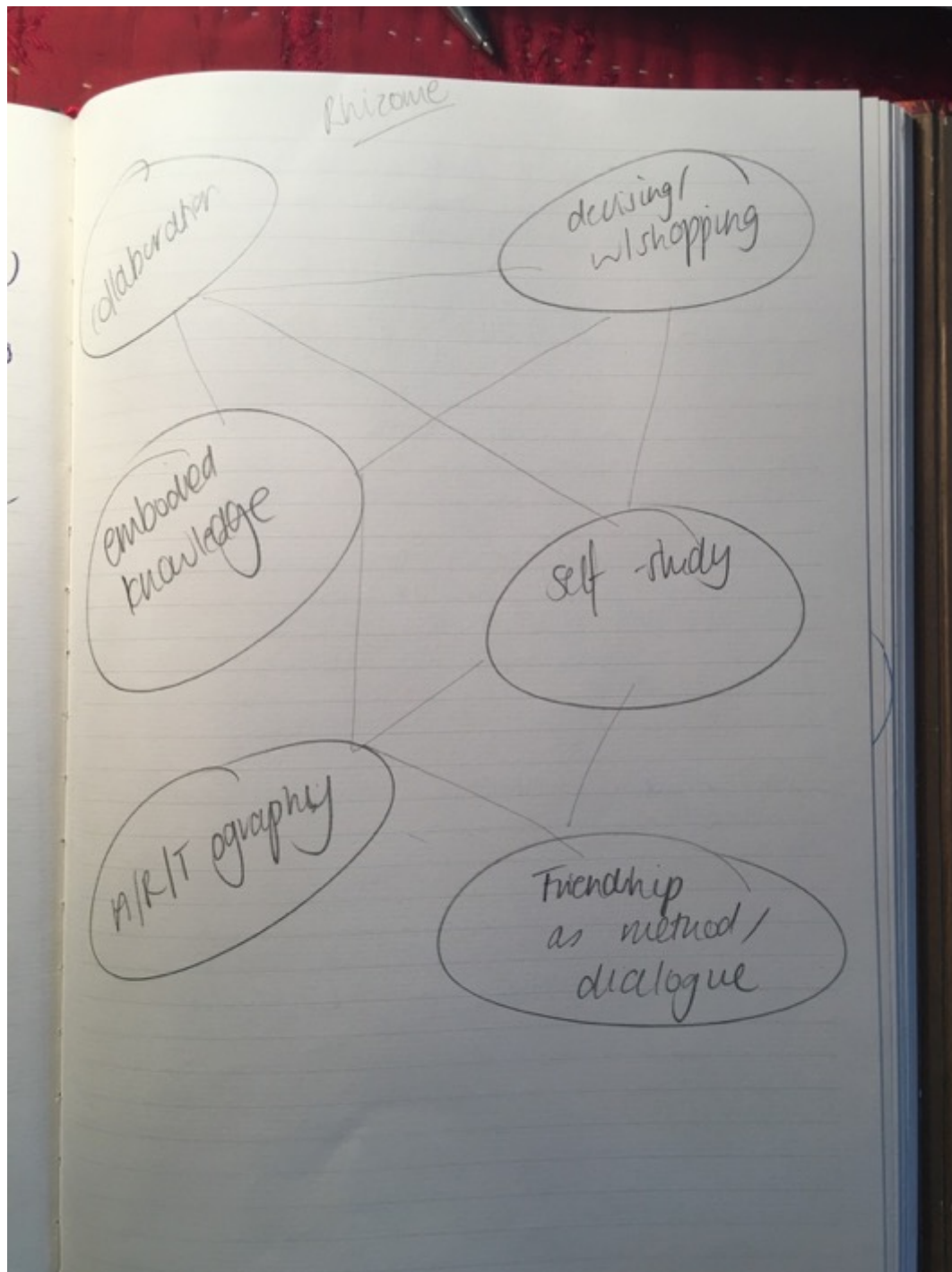


Figure 2. Early rhizomatic concept map for the thesis

The rhizomatic concept map above details some of my early thinking in terms of the concepts and areas of scholarship that my thesis would have to engage with. The diagram attempts to find ways to connect the disparate concepts and areas of research that were floating around my head, and to find a way to map a path through these different aspects of the study. Some of the ideas above, such as collaboration, devising/ workshoping,

friendship, and dialogue served as springboards to further explorations and new ideas, whilst others such as a/r/tography and embodied knowledge did not have a great impact on the direction of the study. Instead, as my thinking developed, I was able to construct the following *artefact of thinking* of my initial structure for the thesis:

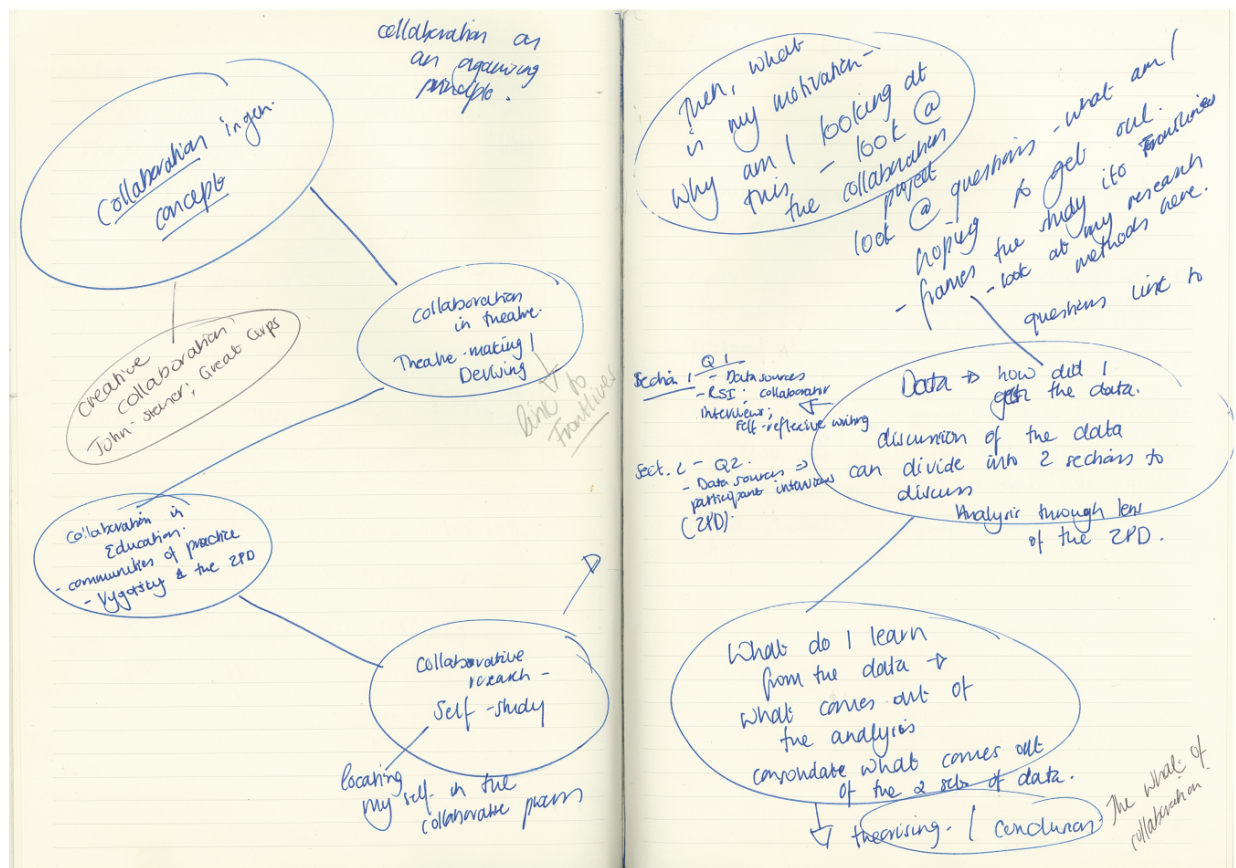
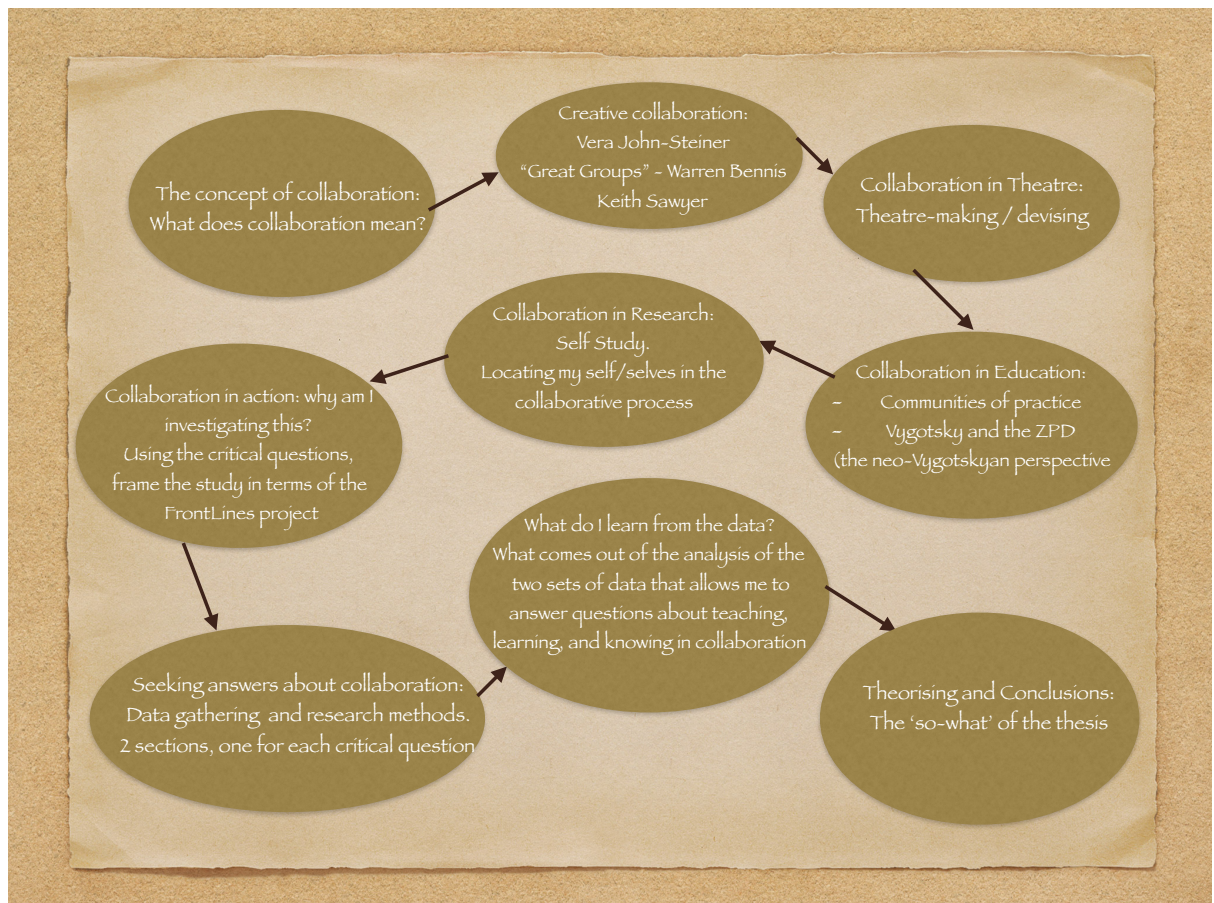


Figure 3. Rhizomatic thesis diagram in my research notebook

This visual map therefore forms the impetus for my thinking about how to approach the actual structuring of the thesis – I used it to delineate all the different areas and aspects that the thesis needed to cover, and then used it to decide on a rough order of chapters, as I began the writing process.

I am a member of what Vera John-Steiner calls a ‘community of thought’ (John-Steiner, 2000), in the form of the Self-Reflexive Research support group based at UKZN’s School of Education. This group, which forms part of the Transformative Education Studies Project - a joint project between the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban University of Technology,

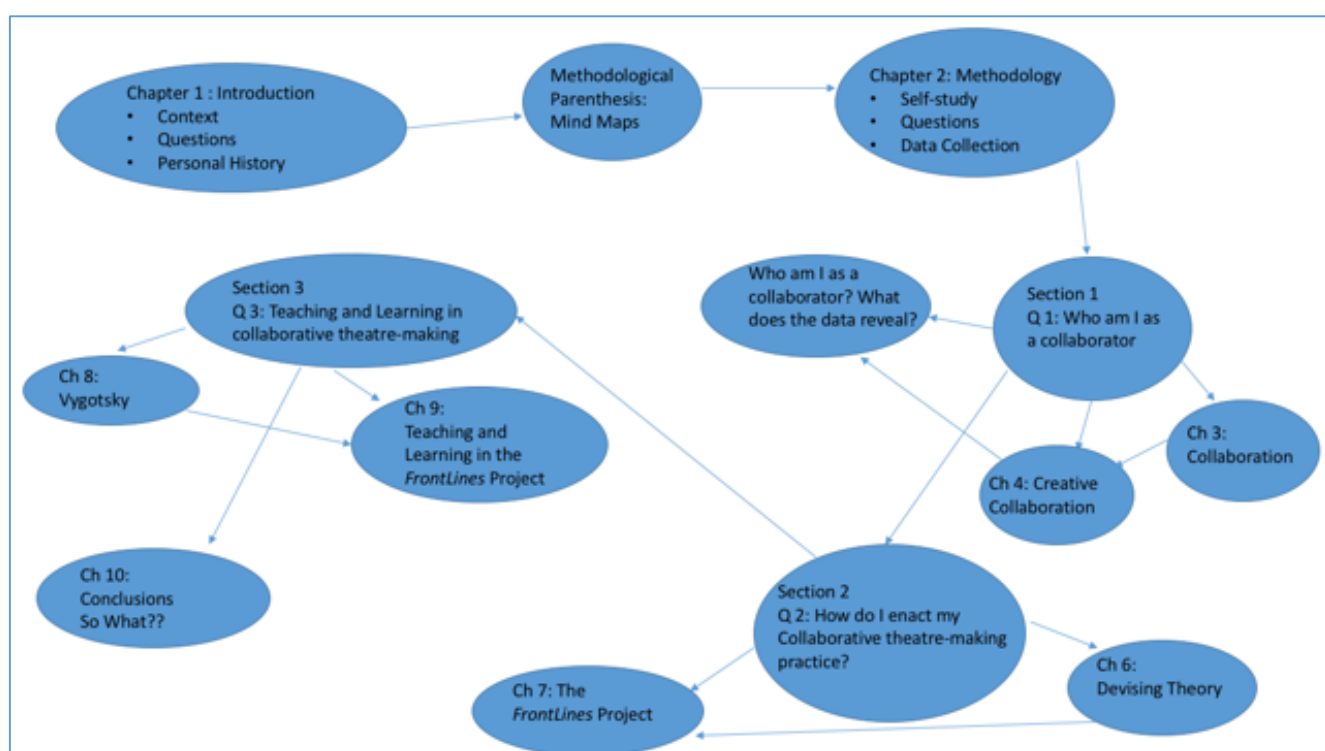
and Walter Sisulu University – meets roughly once a month under the leadership of Prof. Kathleen Pithouse-Morgan, Dr Daisy Pillay, and Dr Inbanathan Naicker, and offers both students and supervisors a collaborative and supportive space in which to test ideas and learn from others. Other students in the group have used their presentations at these meetings as a form of relational validity, as the group operates as incidental critical friends. My own presentations for the group have revealed a number of extremely useful insights as my thinking has been challenged and stretched by my colleagues' comments and questions. At our monthly meeting in February 2016, I presented this diagram in a neater format, for feedback from the group:



*Figure 4: The version of the thesis rhizome that was presented to the Self-Reflexive Research group.*



The feedback from the presentation of this diagram was instrumental in helping me to find a way through the writing of this thesis, and the structuring of my central argument. Later in the writing process, however, I reached an impasse; I realised that the rather conventional structure that I had developed in the image above was not working. As I wrestled with the complex problem of how to connect “excerpts plus literature plus data” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2010, p. 150), I radically re-thought the structure of the thesis, and developed the following visual map:



*Figure 5. The re-thought thesis structure*

This map has served to guide me through the writing journey of this thesis<sup>18</sup>, as it has helped me to “clarify these evolving ideas, enabling a return to the textual analysis and writing with new understandings” (Butler-Kisber & Poldma, 2010, p. 9).

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<sup>18</sup> As the writing has progressed, and this thesis has neared completion, I have continued to refine, adapt, and change this plan, to clarify my argument.

These examples serve to illustrate how visual mapping of concepts and ideas has informed the construction of meaning in my thesis as my thinking has developed. This method of visual representation, and the fact that I have chosen to include it here, falls within the ambit of self-study research, as explained by Anastasia Samaras,

Arts-based self-study researchers use a wide range of art forms to represent and reinterpret, construct, and deconstruct meaning, and communicate their study of researching as they make it public. It can take many forms including visual/image-based arts, for example, portraits, performance, photography, video documentary, art installations, multimedia representations, films, drawings, cartoons, graffiti, signs, cyber graphics, and diagrams. (2010, p. 722)

Samaras also connects the use of such arts-based methods to the construction of knowledge “based in Vygotskian thought” (2010, p. 734), while Holbrook Mahn and Manuel F. Aguilar-Tamayo have connected Vygotskian theories of concept formation to the theories of concept mapping (2010), both of which ideas conforms to the thrust of this thesis, which will use Vygotskian notions to examine the processes of learning implicit in my collaborative theatre-making practice. Thus, the inclusion of my artefacts of thinking allow me to infuse both self-study methodologies, and Vygotskian thought into the very fabric of my thesis.

Having shown how I am using visual mapping in the construction of my thought in this thesis, I am now able to move onto a more detailed discussion of self-study as a research methodology, as well as the methods and approaches I have used in gathering my data, in my analysis of the data, and in my presentation of my findings.

## Chapter 2

### *Reflection, Reflexivity, Self-Study*

*"It's all trivial – your grouse, my hermit, Bernard's Byron. Comparing what we're looking for misses the point. It's wanting to know that makes us matter. Otherwise we're going out the way we came in." (Tom Stoppard, Arcadia. 1993, p. 79-80)*

In discussing the nature and intent of the research agenda, Eliot Eisner observes,

What we think it means to do research has to do with our conception of meaning, our view of cognition, and our beliefs about the forms of consciousness that we are willing to say advance human understanding – an aim, I take it, that defines the primary mission of research (Eisner, 1997, p. 5)

In seeking to understand how I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice, to elucidate the 'selves' that I bring to that practice (who am I?), and the ways in which that practice enables a process of teaching and learning, I am engaging in a process whereby I site my *self* at the centre of my research. By placing myself and my own practice under the microscope of my inquiry, I engage both with reflection and reflexivity, two sides of the same coin. Gillie Bolton provides a useful definition of both *reflection* and *reflexivity*:

*Reflection* is learning and development through examining what we think happened on any occasion, and how we think others perceived the event and us, opening our practice to scrutiny by others, and studying data and texts from a wider sphere.

*Reflexivity* is finding strategies to question our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions, to strive to understand our complex roles in relation to others. ... To be reflexive involves thinking from within experiences... Reflexivity is making elements of the self strange; focusing close attention upon *one's own* actions, thoughts, feelings, values, identity, and

their effect upon others, situations, and professional and social structures.  
(Bolton, 2010, pp. 13-14)

Thus, my research is, by definition, both reflective and self-reflexive; I “bend and turn back in [my] continual quest to move forward from not knowing to knowing” (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, & Pillay, 2014, p. 1). I examine my *self-in-action*, in order to generate knowledge that is rooted in my practice, and which is generated by that practice.

As I have already explained, the chosen research approach for this study is self-study<sup>19</sup>. As a teacher, and as a theatre-maker, this methodology seems to be an extension of my theatrical training, and my natural inclinations. As performers, a large part of our training is about how to reflect upon our actions, in order to improve them. Tamar and I, along with Lorraine Singh, have written about this process as part of our “training in reflexivity”:

In performance, we are trained constantly to reflect on our actions, and to use this process of reflection as a springboard for improving the performance, in an iterative manner. The actor is required to examine their action/s onstage through fine observation of themselves, and through the daily routine of ‘notes’ given by the director...Thus, performance can be seen as a training for reflexive research practices, with the director acting as a critical friend, the ‘other’ against whom the actor can test their insights and understandings. Through the ongoing processes of rehearsal and performance, theatre provides training in iterative thinking, which is the basis of reflexivity. (2014, p. 7)

As a teacher, the same principle holds true. In seeking to elucidate what Whitehead calls an “autobiography of learning” (2010), through the exploration of my personal history

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<sup>19</sup> In the years in which this study has developed, Tamar and I, along with Lorraine Singh, have published a number of papers that deal with the ways in which we have used self-study as a means of understanding our practice (Meskin & van der Walt, 2014; 2018; Meskin, Singh, & van der Walt, 2014). Where necessary, and to avoid self-plagiarism, I have quoted from these directly.



narrative, I am able to engage in a deep analysis of the processes of teaching and learning implicit in the act of collaboration.

We can understand the term self-study “in relation to teaching and researching practice in order to better understand: oneself; teaching; learning; and, the development of knowledge about these.” (Loughran, 2004, p. 9) . Self-study is a methodology that arises out of teacher-education, and which is premised on the idea that as teachers and practitioners “we know more than we can tell” (Polanyi, 1967, p. 4). Thus, self-study falls within the realm of self-reflexive methodologies of research that allow the researcher (usually someone who is involved in some kind of teaching) to examine their own practice, in order to learn more about that practice, and in some way improve it. Sandra Weber points out that

Self-study is often a multi-purpose endeavour that simultaneously involves research, teaching, learning, and evaluation. The design of any self-study usually centres on key questions such as: What am I really doing / teaching? What influences my practice? How does my teaching affect others? How might I improve what I do? How might I view things differently? How can I make a difference to others? (Weber, 2014)

Thus, self-study involves the excavation of the self-in-action, and a deeper understanding of the enacted practice that is created by the self-in-action. As Alan Ovens and Tim Fletcher explain “what stands self-study apart from other forms of practitioner inquiry is the simultaneous focus on understanding self as it enacts practice” (2014, p. 6). Self-study uncovers and examines practice, in order to examine both the self, and the practice itself.

In the body of literature which discusses this particular methodological approach, there is considerable stress on the idea that while the term ‘self-study’ defines the intention of the inquiry, it does not dictate the ways in which the researcher chooses to gather their data, or how they go about analysing it (Loughran, 2004; Samaras, 2011). Rather, it is considered characteristic of self-study that it engages with a range of, largely qualitative, methods (LaBoskey 2004; Loughran 2004; Pinnegar & Hamilton 2010; Samaras 2011), which

include memory work, personal history narratives, arts-based methods, critical friend inquiry (Samaras, 2011), living educational theory (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006), and so on. Thus, in self-study the researcher has a wide range of choices of *how* to generate their data, while the intention of the “inquiry as stance” (LaBoskey, 2004) is more narrowly defined. Vicky Kubler LaBoskey points out that self-study researchers

...utilize methods that will rely upon and give access to evidence of student learning that will capture the complexity and particularity of what we do and of ways in which what we do result in, or not, the reframed thinking and practice of our students and ourselves. (LaBoskey, 2004, p. 839)

Thus, the intent behind my study has informed my choices of methods to be used in answering my key research questions.

### *Using Self-Study to Answer my Critical Questions*

I have chosen to engage with what are considered the five key characteristics of self-study research. While these key characteristics are discussed widely in the work of Loughran (2004), LaBoskey (2004), Pinnegar & Hamilton (2010), I have chosen to structure my study around what Tamar and I have termed our ‘Idiots Guide to Self-Study’. Several years ago, in thinking about how we use self-study to examine our directing practice, I developed a synthesis of the ideas of LaBoskey (2004) and Samaras (2011) regarding these key characteristics of self-study.

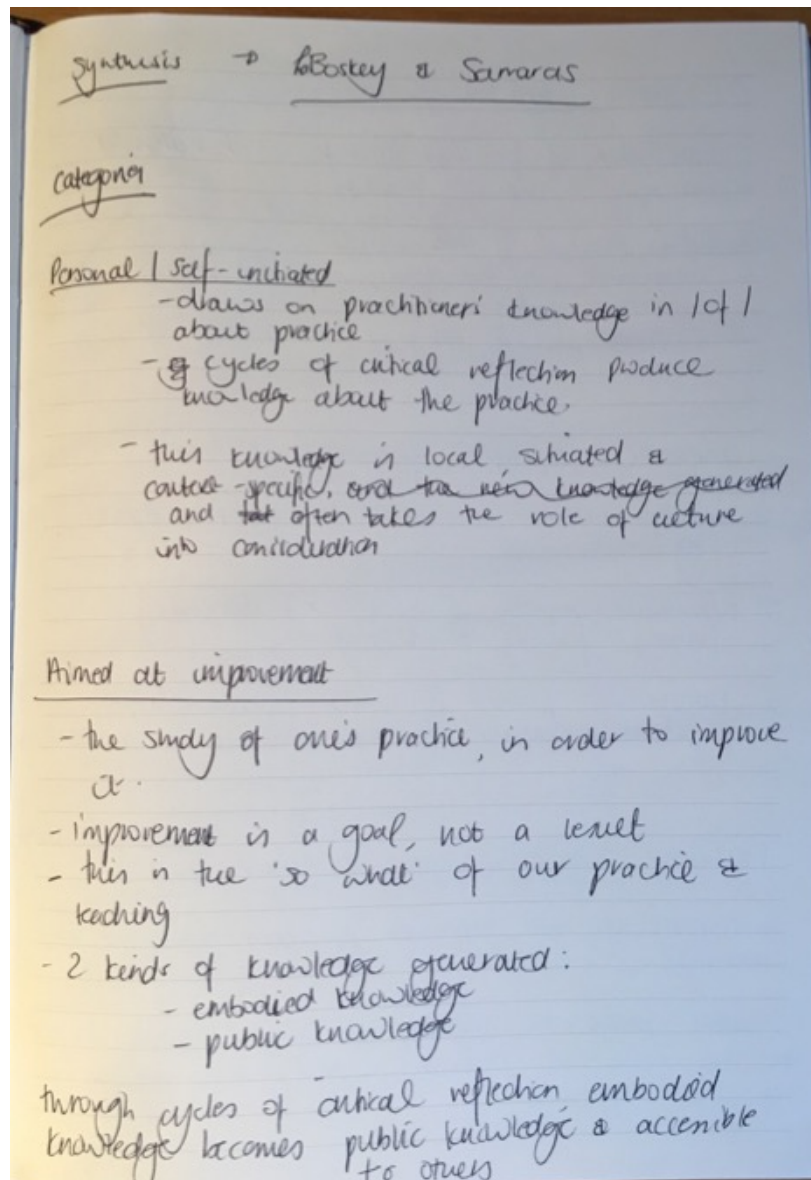


Figure 6. A page from my research notebook, where I developed the 'Idiot's Guide to Self-Study'

Many years later, Tamar and I included this in one of our articles about using self-study to understand the embodied nature of theatre making and theatre pedagogy (Meskin & van der Walt, 2018). I have chosen to reproduce this 'Idiot's Guide' here as a useful means of organising my thinking around the way in which I am using self-study to answer my critical questions in this thesis:

## The Idiot's Guide to Self-Study: A synthesis of LaBoskey and Samaras' ideas

Drawing from the ideas of Samaras (2011, p. 72-82) and LaBoskey (2004, p. 842-853), we can characterise self-study research as follows:

1. It is personal and self-initiated
  - It draws on the practitioner's knowledge in/of/about practice
  - Cycles of critical reflection produce knowledge about the practice
  - This knowledge is local, situated, and context-specific, and often takes the role of culture into account
2. It is aimed at improvement of practice
  - Self-study is the study of one's practice, in order to improve it
  - Improvement is an ongoing goal of the research, not a result
  - This is the 'so what' of our practice and teaching
  - Two kinds of knowledge are generated through self-study
    - Embodied knowledge
    - Public knowledge
  - Through cycles of critical reflection, embodied knowledge becomes public knowledge, which is accessible to others
3. Self-study is a collaborative, interactive process
  - Validation of findings is through collaboration and dialogue with critical friends
  - Self-study research is both personal and inter-personal
  - Collaboration takes place between colleagues in practice and as researchers
  - Self-study researchers collaborate with a range of 'texts' of different types
4. Self-study uses transparent, multiple qualitative methods
  - Multiple methods are used to gather the evidence
  - The research is a hermeneutic spiral of questioning, discovering, framing, reframing and revisiting
  - It is a transparent process of clear documentation of the research process through dialogue and critique
5. Validation of the research is through examples and through making the findings and the knowledge generated public
  - The authority of one's own experience provides a warrant for knowing
  - Readers judge the validity of the claims made, based on the evidence presented, and the rigour of the approach
  - We must make visible our data, our methods, and the links between the data, the findings, and the interpretations made
  - We must share our findings with a larger audience, in order for this validation to take place.

(Meskin & van der Walt, 2018, p. 45)

When I began to think about how these five key characteristics could be applied to my own study, I was able to develop the following *artefact of thinking*:

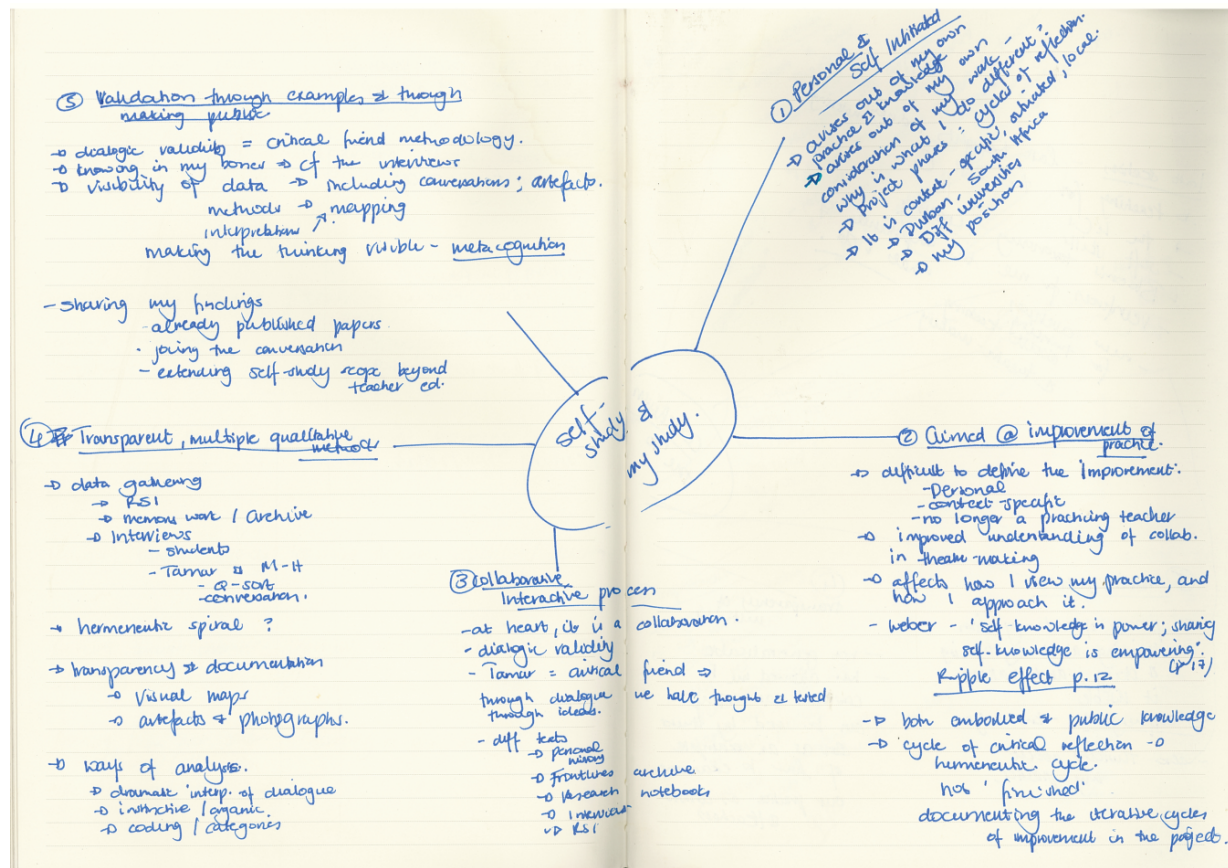


Figure 7. Self-Study and My Study

Working from this, I am able to structure my discussion of how I have gone about answering my critical question, using the five characteristics as sub-headings.

## 1. Self-Study is Personal and Self-Initiated.

As we have already seen, my self-study arises directly out of my own practice, and my knowledge in/of/about that practice. My study began with my own curiosity about what I was doing in the *FrontLines* Project, and my own desire to understand my practice in a deeper and more nuanced way. This study is aimed at helping me to excavate and understand my own knowledge that is “instinctive, somatic, situated, and enacted through

action, as well as being of the mind” (Meskin & van der Walt, 2018, p. 39). It has always been apparent to me that there is something different or rare about how I work with Tamar in particular, and it was out of a sense of wanting to understand what made our work different, that this study arose.

Within the project itself, each of the iterations of the project has constituted a hermeneutic, recursive (Samaras, 2011) cycle of action and reflection upon my collaborative theatre-making practice. Each time we have performed the *FrontLines* Project, we have thought long and hard about what we have learnt from the previous version, and how we need to adapt or adjust the work accordingly. Therefore, in thinking through and examining the multiple phases of the *FrontLines* Project, I am seeking to make evident these processes of critical reflection.

The knowledge that arises out of the *FrontLines* Project and this study, is situated, local, and context-specific; it is rooted in my reality as a White, English-Speaking, middle-class woman, teaching and working in Durban, South Africa. Largely, the students I teach are not from the same race or socio-economic grouping, and they reflect the broad spectrum of races, languages, and cultures that make up the South African population, and so our work together has to negotiate our differences, as well as the ways in which we are the same. The reality of the *FrontLines* Project is also influenced by the differences between the three Universities that are part of the project. Each of these Universities has slightly different racial and language demographics, as well as different teaching and learning approaches, and all of these serve to highlight the particularity of the context of my study. While my study does not dwell on the racial, language, and cultural demographics of the students involved in the project in any way, as this has no real bearing on my critical questions, it is nevertheless important to sketch this context from the outset.

## 2. *Self-Study is Aimed at Improvement of Practice.*

This is probably the hardest aspect of my study to define: because my study is so personal and context-specific, it is hard to delineate exactly what kind of improvement of practice my study will lead to. As Sandra Weber points out,

The most powerful results of a self-study intended to improve our own practice might occur in another arena, a ripple effect that is visible only after our inquiry is completed, and hence undetected, because our gaze has shifted elsewhere. (2014, p. 12)

Thus, it is impossible to predict exactly how and when my study may result in improvement of practice.

Certainly for me personally, the conclusion of this study will lead to an improved understanding of my collaborative theatre-making practice, and I am hopeful that this improved understanding would enable other theatre-makers to be able to see the value in working collaboratively in the way in which I do. An improved understanding of my own practice will affect how I view my work, and how I approach it, which should result in improvements in my practice. However, since this study began, I have moved from the position of full-time University teacher, to that of a full time parent and sometime teacher of theatre. This means that the lessons I learn here may not have a direct influence on my day-to-day existence. However, I also need to consider the possibility that the completion of this study may well lead me down a new path of inquiry altogether. Nevertheless, the knowledge gained through this study will be both embodied, and public, and will constitute another step in the ongoing cycle of action and reflection that constitutes the *FrontLines* Project.

### *3. Self-Study is a Collaborative, Interactive Process.*

As my theatre-making practice is collaborative, so is my research process. At its heart, this study is a result of the continued thinking together that underpins everything that Tamar and I do. Through years of discussion, creative work, and academic writing together, Tamar and I have engaged in an ongoing and constant process of what Samaras calls “dialogic validity” (2011, p. 219). Over countless cups of tea and glasses of wine, in between classes, and in each other’s homes, during trips away from home, and in long phone conversations, she has helped me to “provoke new ideas and interpretations, question [my] assumptions, and participate in open, honest, and constructive feedback” (Samaras, 2011, p. 75).

While these conversations are largely unrecorded, their importance in helping to shape my thinking cannot be overstated. Thus, Tamar has acted as a ‘critical friend’ in my research process, which is a key aspect of self-study (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2010). Whitehead and McNiff explain that,

The responsibility of a critical friend is to be both a friend and a critic. As a friend, you are supportive and available to listen to the practitioner’s account of their research. As a critic, your work is to offer thoughtful responses to the account, raising points that perhaps the practitioner has not thought about. (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006, p. 103)

As an “interested, invested partner in the research endeavour” (Meskin, Singh, & van der Walt, 2014, p. 9), Tamar’s constant input has served to make my inquiry both personal and interpersonal, private and public.

In addition, as I have already mentioned, I have tested many of my ideas in the forum of the Self-Reflexive Research support group, who have also acted as critical friends, offering continued feedback, commentary and ideas about my research for many years. My research



has been enriched by the lively and sometimes contentious discussions that take place in these meetings, and by being exposed to the ideas of people in such diverse fields as Medicine, Media, Visual Arts, Jewellery Design, Mathematics and Science Education, and HIV/AIDs Education, amongst others. The varied worldviews and areas of expertise represented in the group have provided me with numerous new insights and ideas as this study has developed.

My study also engages with a variety of different ‘texts’; from theories of devising, collaboration, teaching and learning; to the *FrontLines* Project archive, consisting of thousands of pages of notes, materials, ideas, sketches, photographs, performance recordings, and scripts; to the recordings and transcripts of my interviews with my chosen participants; to the recording and transcript of my Reciprocal Self-Interview; to my personal journals and research notebooks. These texts form a palimpsest of sources that have helped to shape my thinking in this thesis (see 5.3 below).

#### *4. Self-Study uses Transparent, Multiple Qualitative Methods*

In seeking to answer my key research questions, I have chosen to engage a number of different methods of data collection and analysis. This section will describe in detail the ways in which I have gathered my data, and how I have approached the analysis of the data, in order to make my research process as transparent as possible.

##### *4.1 The Reciprocal Self-Interview*

In examining the *self-in-action*, I engaged at first in a process of autobiographical writing. However, it quickly became apparent that I was both editing and censoring myself, instead of simply allowing my personal history narrative to develop. In discussions with

Tamar, it was clear that she was having similar difficulties with her own research. Following a suggestion from Lorraine Singh, and in an extension of techniques that are rooted in theatre and Drama in Education practice, we (along with Lorraine) developed what we have termed 'The Reciprocal Self-Interview'<sup>20</sup> (RSI). Using Lorraine's experience of interviewing herself during her own doctoral study, as well as the 'hot-seating' technique often used in character development for an actor, we created a way of interviewing ourselves, through our critical friend. We explain that

In the RSI, while the researcher should set the questions or choose the prompts to be used, the questions and prompts must be posed by another, a critical friend who can serve as a sounding board and who can probe further, thus preventing the researcher from evading the self. Thus the RSI engages the idea of dialogic reflexivity as the researcher interrogates the self through the person of the other. The RSI can therefore function as an enactment of reflexivity – as a way of seeing reflexivity in action. (Meskin, Singh, & van der Walt, 2014, p. 11)

Thus, I set the questions for my RSI, which included the following:

1. Did you always want to be a theatre maker and director? Why?
2. How would you describe your directing style? Why do you choose to direct in the way that you do?
3. Why do you choose to work collaboratively?
4. Do you think that you are a good collaborator?
5. Where do your directing styles and ideas come from?
6. What do you think you bring to the collaborative theatre-making process?

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<sup>20</sup> The process of developing the Reciprocal Self-Interview, and our thinking around it, is documented in Meskin, Singh, & van der Walt, *Putting the Self in the Hot Seat: Enacting Reflexivity through Dramatic Strategies*, 2014.

Tamar, Lorraine, and I then met one Saturday afternoon at my home, and I interviewed Tamar, using her questions, and she interviewed me, using mine. The resulting interview was recorded, and observed by Lorraine, and then the transcript was analysed along with the other data sources for the study (see 4.4 below). For Tamar, Lorraine, and I the RSI “imagines a new kind of formalisation of the critical friend role.... as the voice prompt and mirror for the researcher, reflecting back the self so that one’s practice can be revealed and dynamically engaged in a living, interactive dialogue” (2014, p. 10).

The RSI allowed us, therefore, to step outside of our own heads, and certainly for me was an important part of my research process; in listening to my own responses, I realised that I knew far more than I had thought, and that in answering the questions verbally, I was able to articulate many insights and ideas that I did not even know I had. The RSI thus helped me to ‘make my self strange’ (Bolton, 2010), to step outside of my self, and to look at myself through the mirror of the critical friend.

#### *4.2 Interviews*

Because it is imperative in self-study to engage with the self-in-relation, and because I needed to be able to test my own experiences and ideas about my practice against those of the other people involved in that practice, I also engaged in semi-structured interviews with both Tamar and Marié-Heleen, as well as with some of the students who had collaborated with us on the *FrontLines* Project.

My discussions with Tamar and Marié-Heleen were initially based around Vera John-Steiner's 'Collaboration Q-Sort' (2000)<sup>21</sup>. This method involves presenting collaborators with a series of statements regarding collaboration. Participants are then asked to arrange the statements along a bell curve, ranging from statements that are most descriptive of their collaboration, to those least descriptive of their collaboration. I used most of the statements suggested by John-Steiner, but did leave some of hers out of my selection, as I felt that they had no bearing on my critical questions. Once Tamar and Marié-Heleen had made their selections, I photographed these lists, and then used them to elicit discussion of the collaborative process.



Figure 8: Marié-Heleen's Q-sort responses. Photographs from my private collection.



Figure 9: Tamar's Q-sort responses. Photographs from my private collection.

I later formalised the lists that each of them had made, by creating a spreadsheet of their responses<sup>22</sup>. However, it became apparent once I began to analyse the data that there

<sup>21</sup> Please see Appendix 3 for the full list of Q-sort statements that I used.

<sup>22</sup> See Appendix 4.

was no real use in the patterns that the Q-sort revealed; rather, their primary function had served to open up a very wide-ranging and in-depth discussion of our collaboration; for example, my interview with Tamar, which took place during a working weekend away from home, lasted for more than 2 hours. Needless to say, each of these interviews generated rich data for my study.

In interviewing the students who had been part of the *FrontLines* Project, I approached the task slightly differently; firstly, in selecting these student participants, I chose to use the following criteria:

- Accessibility – I chose to interview former students with whom I was still in contact, and who were geographically close to me, since this allowed for in-depth, face-to-face discussions.
- Range of experiences – I chose to interview students who represented a range of different types of engagement with the project; thus, the students interviewed came from at least two of the institutions involved, and had been part of a range of different incarnations of the project. There was only one student (Kamini) who was part of every version of the *FrontLines* Project. The other former students whom I interviewed had been involved in a number of different evolutions, or may only have been part of one iteration of the project.
- Critical distance – all the former students interviewed had already graduated by the time that they were interviewed, and had had at least a year to reflect upon the process of the *FrontLines* Project. I was particularly interested in what insights this distance in time would allow them, as they considered their learning within the project.

I therefore chose the following participants:

- Kamini<sup>23</sup> – a recent MA graduate, now working as a teacher in the Drama and Performance Studies programme at UKZN, who was the only person to take part in all four iterations of the *FrontLines* Project
- Brandon – a recent MA graduate, who has pursued a successful career in professional theatre, working mainly as a Stage Manager. He fitted his interview in between rehearsals for a large musical theatre production.
- Lauren – A BA(Hons) graduate who had gone on to complete a teaching qualification, and who is working as a full-time teacher of Drama in a High School.
- Devaksha – A successful MA graduate who is now pursuing her own doctoral research.
- Nhlakanipho – a graduate of DUT, with a National Diploma in Drama Studies, he has established a very successful career as an actor, appearing in stage and television programmes.

Because of their very busy lives, it worked best that I met these student participants informally, at a restaurant or coffee shop. I met with Kamini and Brandon together, and Tamar also joined us for lunch, adding her own insights to our conversation. I then met with Lauren and Devaksha, also for a casual lunch. I met Nhlakanipho on his own, as he was extremely busy rehearsing for his performance as Othello, and could only spare a short hour for our conversation. While I did have a list of questions for the student participants<sup>24</sup>, these were used mainly as prompts for the semi-structured interviews, and there was a great deal of freedom in our conversations to deviate from the set pattern of the questions. I also found that interviewing the students together allowed the conversation to meander and deepen, as they engaged in dialogue both with me, and with each other, about their

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<sup>23</sup> All of my participants agreed to my using their real names, although I have chosen not to use the student participants' surnames.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix 5.

experiences. As a result, the conversations were often long, and very candid, and for this reason I have chosen not to include the transcripts of any of my interviews as appendices to this thesis; I feel that it would betray the trust placed in me by my respondents to share their unguarded and honest dialogue<sup>25</sup>.

### *4.3 Other Data Sources*

In addition to these interviews, I also used a number of other data sources, including the *FrontLines* archive, which I mined for photographs of rehearsal and performance, as well as excerpts of the performance text (See Section 1). I also looked at my own directing notebooks and personal journals, using these to help me to construct my personal history narrative. I also watched the video recordings of performances of the *FrontLines* Project, to help me to reconstruct the way in which we had devised the work.

Over the years during which this study has developed, Tamar and I, along with Marié-Heleen and Lorraine, have published a number of papers, dealing with the *FrontLines* Project itself, and with our use of self-study as a means to understand our theatrical practice. I have used all of these papers as resources in this thesis, and have quoted directly from them where necessary, to avoid any plagiarism.

### *4.4 Analysis of the data*

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<sup>25</sup> The transcripts of the interviews are held in my private collection, and can be made available to interested readers, upon request.

Each of these interviews was recorded on a digital voice recorder, and then transcribed by a professional service. I then spent time listening to the recordings, and going through each transcript carefully, to ensure their accuracy and to 'clean' the data by removing any errors in transcription. I then set about analysing the data, looking for "manageable themes, patterns, trends and relationships" (Mouton, 2001, p. 108). Initially, I read the transcripts as I would any play text, seeking to find the subtext, and the hidden meanings imbedded in the dialogue. I approached this task with an open mind, working in an instinctive and organic manner. Once I had done this and gained a broad overview, I looked at the data again and again, each time searching for a different set of codes or categories; firstly, I looked for parts of the dialogue that related to the way in which I enact my practice, and the genesis of the *FrontLines* Project. Next, I applied a different lens to the data, and looked for codes and categories that related to my theoretical understanding of the nature of collaboration, and creative collaboration in particular. Lastly, I searched the data for evidence of teaching and learning, and coded these to generate different types of teaching and learning in the project. In each of these steps, I then went on to build visual maps of the different themes that arose out of the coding of the data, finding my way into the connections and relationships between different aspects of the data. Thus, my handling of the data was a recursive, hermeneutic process of "making meaning of [my] data" (Samaras, 2011, p. 198).

##### *5. Validation of Self-Study Research is Through Examples and Through Making the Findings and the Knowledge Generated Public.*

One of the most important critiques of the self-study methodology concerns the notion of validity; the question is how the researchers can separate themselves from the research, when they are both researcher, and the researched 'other'. Alan Feldman articulates this concern, saying

Issues of validity are important because when we engage in reflective processes that focus on ourselves (as in the construction of autobiographical narratives), we cannot be sure of the accuracy of what we see. That is because when we



reflect, we do not know if what we see in the mirror is accurate or the distorted view provided by a funhouse mirror. Our new knowledge, understanding, or insight may be flawed because it is based on a distortion of the world. (2003, p. 27)

Thus, the challenge for self-study researchers is to find ways to prevent the ‘distortion’ of their view of the self-in-action, through a rigorous, transparent, dialogic research process. There is no way for the self-study researcher to be ‘objective’ in their approach; rather, we can understand objectivity as “a chimera: a mythical creature that never existed, save in the imaginations of those who believe that knowing can be separated from the knower.” (Guba & Lincoln, 2005, p. 208). Rather, like all self-reflexive research, I assert the “authority of experience” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2010, p. 153), and rely on my subjective, “felt knowledge” (Miller, 2016, p. 143).

Instead of objective ‘truth’ as a standard of value for research, I, like many self-study researchers, understand validity in Guba and Lincoln’s terms of being “authentic, trustworthy, rigorous” (2005, p. 207), and in terms of Mischler’s notion of validation as “the process(es) through which we make claims for and evaluate the ‘trustworthiness’ of reported observations, interpretations, and generalizations.” (1990, p. 418). Thus, my study seeks to make a claim to validity through the use of transparency, dialogic validity, and multiple data sources, and by sharing of my findings with a larger audience.

### *5.1 Transparency*

As we have already seen, in the Methodological Parenthesis that preceded this chapter, and in the discussion of my methods in (4) above, I have sought to make transparent my methods and ways of thinking. Through the detailed exposition of my data collection and analysis method, as well as through the use of visual mapping, I have sought to make available to the reader a clear sense of how I have come to the meanings that I have constructed in this study.

## *5.2 Dialogic Validity*

One of the most widely used responses to the problem of validity in self-study is the use of the insights and responses of others as ways of testing the veracity and authenticity of the researchers' insights. As John Loughran explains

The term self-study does not universally convey an understanding of commitment to checking data and interpretations with others, so to the unwary, it is easy for self-study to be a misleading descriptor. An initial response to the term self-study may well conjure up notions of withdrawn, self-reflective individuals, more concerned for themselves than the world around them. ... In such cases, the term appears to carry with it constraints or barriers that are not intended but which nonetheless arise. Yet paradoxically, the checking of data and interpretations is crucial in addressing this very 'egocentric' concern. (Loughran, 2004, pp. 19-20)

Thus, the idea of what has come to be called the 'critical friends' method is widely used in self-study to test and validate the research (Pinnegar & Hamilton 2010; Samaras 2011; Whitehead & McNiff 2006). As I have already explained, in working with Tamar as my 'critical friend', we have engaged in a continuous and ongoing process of discussion and dialogue, "to make visible hidden elements in [my] practice and their connection to and influence on [my] practice" (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2010, p. 163). In addition, I have used the members of the Self-Reflexive Research support group as another space in which to present my ideas for feedback and public discussion, to further test my concepts and understandings.

### 5.3 Multiple Data Sources

As I have already shown, I have consulted multiple data sources; these include my own personal history narrative, my personal notebooks and journals, the *FrontLines* archive, my RSI, interviews with my collaborators, and interviews with student participants, as well as grappling with a wide selection of published texts and theoretical understandings. This broad range of sources has allowed “the development of diverse perspectives” (Samaras, 2011, p. 213) in the meanings that I have constructed from the data. No understanding or meaning is made from only one source; rather, using multiple sources has allowed me to engage in a process of ‘crystallization’, to use Laurel Richardson’s term (in Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005), where I am not simply triangulating the data, but rather viewing it, as Richardson does, prismatically:

I propose that the central imaginary for ‘validity’ for postmodern texts is not the triangle – a rigid, fixed, two-dimensional object. Rather, the central imaginary is the crystal, which combines symmetry and substance with an infinite variety of shapes, substances, transmutations, multidimensionalities, and angles of approach. Crystals grow, change, and are altered, but they are not amorphous. Crystals are prisms that reflect externalities and refract within themselves, creating different colors, patterns, and arrays casting off in different directions. What we see depends on our angle of repose – not triangulation but rather crystallization. (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005, p. 963)

Thus, I have tested my memories and my ‘gut feelings’ against the insights and memories of all my participants, as well as the many artefacts and archival materials, to produce a layered and multi-dimensional response to my critical questions.

In addition, I have tried as far as possible to represent the data as faithfully and authentically as possible. Through including the real words of my participants, and by showing the dialogue as it unfolded in my interviews as far as possible, as well as including my own contributions to the conversation, I am able to “make certain that the voices from

the self and the other are both present” (Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2010, p. 155). By presenting the voices and thoughts of my participants as they were spoken to me and with me, I am able to show the ways in which meaning was made and insight was generated in the act of the interview itself.

#### *5.4 Sharing my findings with a larger audience*

Over the years in which I have worked on this study, I have presented my ideas in a wider forum in a number of different ways. Firstly, and at its heart, the *FrontLines* Project is a publically performed way of thinking; a living, enacted artefact of my thinking in action. In addition, Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I have presented and published papers about the project at a number of national and international conferences, and in books and journals. In addition, in learning about and using the self-study approach, Tamar, Lorraine, and I have published papers and presented our ideas about the ways in which we have used self-study to understand not only our pedagogy, but also our artistic, creative practice of theatre-making. Thus, this thesis represents just one part of the continuous process of making public my ideas and findings that have been generated by this ongoing study.

#### *Conclusions*

Thus, I have shown the ways in which I have made use of self-study as a means to reflect upon my own practice of collaborative theatre-making, by engaging with the five key characteristics of self-study research. In so doing, I have engaged in a deep process of self-reflexive thinking in, as Pinnegar and Hamilton put it,

...the space that Bhaktin (1981) labels the zone of maximal contact – the moment when past, present, and future are in greatest contact with each other. This is the zone of inconclusivity. Study in this uncertain, inconclusive space changes our understanding and thus our experience of our past, and alters the trajectory and

experiences of the future as well as in the present moment in which we stand.  
(2010, p. 162)

### *A note about the structure and design of this thesis*

As a result of the process of ‘crystallization’ described in (5.3) above, this thesis deviates considerably from the traditional structure of a dissertation, which usually includes the following chapters: Introduction, Literature Review, Research Design and Methodology, Results Presentation and Discussion, and Conclusions and Recommendations (Mouton, 2001, pp. 122-125). Instead, I have chosen to divide the thesis into three Sections, one for each critical question. In each of these sections, the relevant literature, self-reflection, personal history narrative, and various data sources and analysis all flow from and into each other around a critical question, in a recursive and interwoven manner.

In Section 1, I seek to answer the question “How do I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice? (with specific reference to the *FrontLines* Project). In so doing, I engage with a discussion of theories and practices of devising theatre, as well as with a detailed analysis of the making of the *FrontLines* Project, based on a variety of data sources.

In Section 2, I seek to answer the question “Who am I as a collaborator?”. In attempting to formulate a sense of myself as a collaborator, I engage with theoretical understandings of collaboration, and creative collaboration, and using these understandings, I excavate my own practice as a collaborative theatre-maker.

In Section 3, I seek to answer my last critical question, “How does my practice of collaborative theatre-making create a space for teaching and learning? Why?” In so doing, I first analyse the data to reveal the different types of teaching and learning which can be

identified in the *FrontLines* Project. Then, I posit a theoretical understanding of why this teaching and learning took place in the project, using a Vygotskian model.

The thesis concludes with a brief discussion which reflects on my learning within this study, and opens up new avenues for exploration in future research.

Let us therefore ‘leap into the fray’, as we set off on this exploration of my collaborative theatre-making practice.

## *Section 1: How do I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice?*

In order to interrogate and understand my collaborative theatre-making practice, it is first necessary to grapple with what that practice actually encompasses. For this reason, the first critical question that this thesis seeks to answer is:

- How do I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice? (with specific reference to the *FrontLines* Project)

To answer this question, this section of the work firstly grapples with a theoretical discussion of devising, since this is the form of collaborative theatre-making that we engaged in the *FrontLines* Project<sup>26</sup>. An understanding of why and how devising works will allow a more nuanced and complete understanding of the demands of making a piece of theatre from scratch. Once I have established this broad framework, I will then move on to a detailed discussion of the project itself. In order to do this, I have drawn on:

- data generated through my interviews with both Marié-Heleen and Tamar and my interviews with students who were involved in the project;
- my own Reciprocal Self Interview (RSI);
- my own memories and recollections of the process;
- my own production notebooks and other artefacts from the making process;
- photographs and videos taken during rehearsals in Pretoria;
- production photographs from all versions of the production;

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<sup>26</sup> In our collaborative practice, Tamar and I have certainly worked together to direct scripted plays, which makes use of our creative and collaborative skills, but in a slightly different way. Because the focus of this thesis lies with collaborative theatre-making, with a particular emphasis on the *FrontLines* Project, I have chosen to focus my discussion on the process of devising which we used in the making of this particular work.

- a number of published and unpublished papers that Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I have written about the project<sup>27</sup>, which I have used as data sources.

Of course, it is almost impossible to convey here exactly what we did and how we did it in all aspects of the theatrical performance, as this would take up an entire thesis in itself. It is also impossible to adequately describe the actual performance itself; like all theatre, it is ephemeral and impermanent, made real in the moment of its being performed before an audience. Rather, I have sought to answer my question by focusing my discussion on the why and the how of the major decision-making processes regarding material, structure of the piece, performance style, directorial processes, as well as on the ways in which we worked collaboratively with the cast to co-construct the meaning of the work.

Thus, this section provides a theoretical framework for devising, which is then used as a lens, as I move on to discuss the implementation of the devising process in the *FrontLines* Project. In examining the project itself, I have used the theory of devising as a lens through which to examine the data, looking for areas of congruence, and of divergence. In order to crystallize my response to this first critical question, I combine theory, memory, personal history, and the responses of my interview subjects, to generate an understanding of the process of making the *FrontLines* Project, which is reflected in the visual map below. As far as possible, I have also included photographs of both the rehearsal process and the performances, to give the reader a clearer idea of the aesthetic impact of the work.

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<sup>27</sup> In order to avoid self-plagiarism, and because these are all co-written articles, I have quoted directly from these papers where necessary.



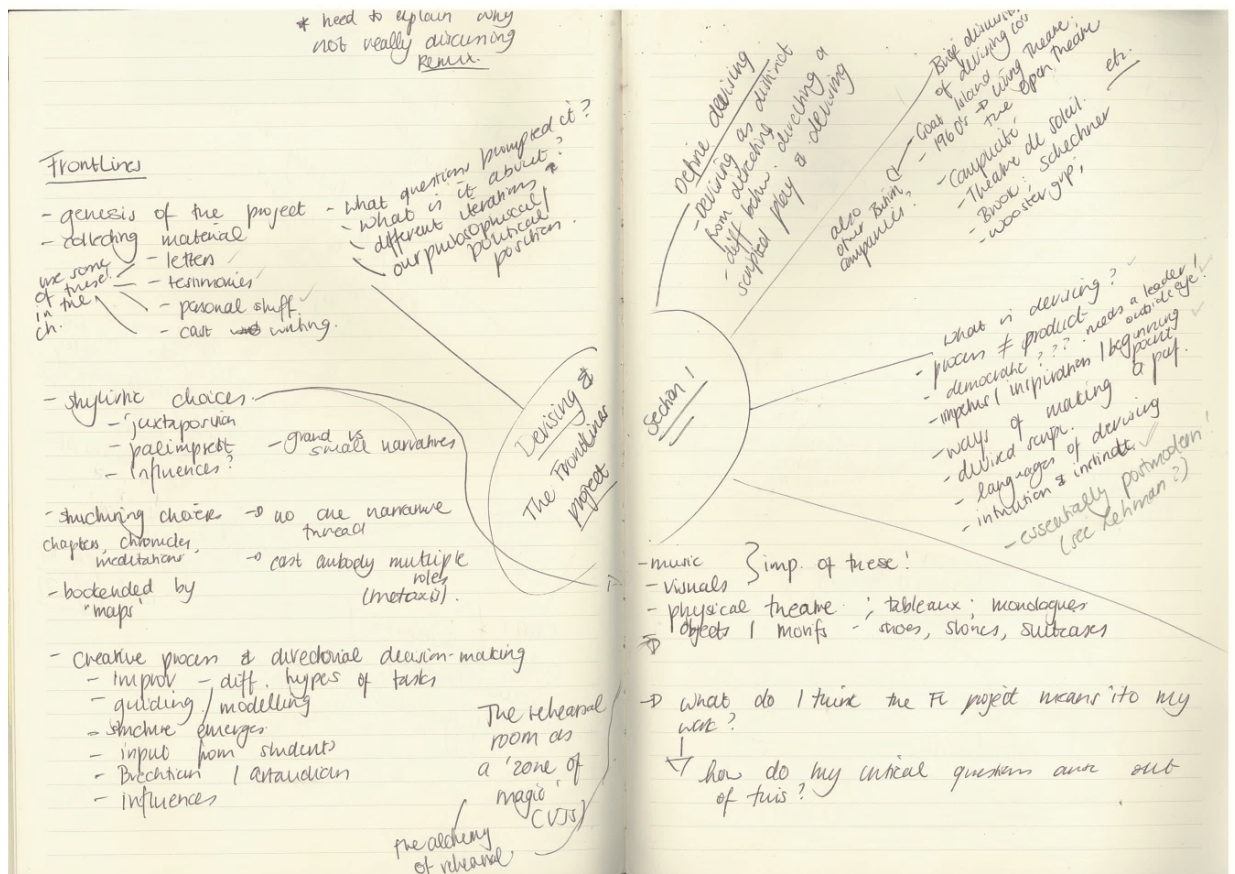


Figure 10: A visual map of how I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice

## Chapter 3

### *“Devising matters”*

(Govan, Nicholson, & Normington, 2007, p. 194)

So what is “collaborative theatre-making”, as I have called it. While all theatre is collaboratively made, what I mean by this phrase is the type of theatre that is created collaboratively by director(s), performers, and other artists, through a process of devising and improvisation. In Britain, and Australia this type of theatre is largely referred to as ‘Devised Theatre’, while in the United States it is more commonly referred to as ‘Collaborative Creation’ (Heddon & Milling, 2006)<sup>28</sup>. In South Africa, we tend to characterise this as devised theatre, or as ‘workshopped theatre’. All these terms mean the same thing, and are used interchangeably.

In the last few years, a number of texts have appeared which attempt to grapple with the creation process of theatrical devising both from a practical and theoretical point of view. The works of Oddey (1994); Heddon and Milling (2006); Govan, Nicholson and Normington (2007); Mermikedes and Smart (2010); and Radosavljevic (2013) have all provided a range of theoretical frameworks and practical examples against which to develop my understanding of the devising process as it unfolds in my own work. In tracing the history of devising, these theorists demonstrate how contemporary devised theatre practitioners have, since the 1950s, built upon the aesthetics of experimental and avant-

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<sup>28</sup> Duska Radosavljevic (2013, p. 65) is of the opinion that the term ‘devised theatre’ is a uniquely British one, and that its usage in other countries varies. I am not completely in agreement with her, but acknowledge that what constitutes devised theatre in one part of the world may be different in another part of the world. My own practice draws heavily on both British and American models, as well as the more specifically South African techniques of ‘workshopping’.

garde theatre of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. They also consider in detail the works of a range of different theatre companies, offering a broad consideration of the different forms of devised theatre, and the varied processes of theatre-making which result in the development of new theatrical languages and modes of thought. While this thesis does not offer the scope to discuss all these ideas, this is the basis upon which my discussion here is built.

### *Devising: A Working Definition*

Allison Oddey provides a useful definition from which to start in understanding collaborative theatre-making, or devised theatre:

Devised theatre can start from anything. It is determined by a group of people who set up an initial framework or structure to explore and experiment with ideas, images, concepts, themes, or specific stimuli that might include music, text, objects, paintings, or movement. A devised theatrical performance originates with the group while making the performance, rather than starting from a play text that someone else has written to be interpreted. A devised theatre product is work that has emerged from and been generated by a group of people working in collaboration. (1994, p. 1)

This definition furnishes us with a number of important ideas about devised theatre, which can be broken down as follows:

- “Devised theatre can come from anything”: any piece of information, or a piece of writing, or an object, or a concept, or a question, can form the impetus for a piece of theatre to be created - the possibilities are endless. Thus, devised theatre arises out of something that interests, or troubles, or excites the people involved in the making of the final product.
- “...a devised theatrical performance originates with the group” – in devising, it is the group that makes the new piece of theatre. Even if they are using written sources

(but not a play text in its entirety), the final product is always determined by the particular alchemy of those particular people and that particular creative process.

- “...working in collaboration” – possibly more so that any other type of theatrical work, devising is collaborative. Even in a solo performance, there are other people who are part of the devising process, such as the director(s), and the technical artists who work with the performer to create the final product.

Oddey’s definition goes on to include a number of key ideas; firstly, she observes that “Devising is a process of making theatre that enables a group of performers to be physically and practically creative” (1994, p. 1). Much of devised theatre relies on a very physicalized performance style. This style develops out of the creative improvisation of the rehearsal process, and is a good example of an *active, physicalized* creativity. At the same time, creating a performance is always a practical process, because it has to *work* on stage, and be within the realm of what is physically and technically possible in that particular space, with those particular people, at that specific time. Her second important point is that “There is a freedom of possibilities for all those involved to discover” (1994, p. 1); since devising is a process of ‘making it up as we go along’, there is enormous creative freedom in the process. A piece of devised theatre can cross boundaries of style, genre, mode of delivery, and take any form or happen in any space that the participants care to imagine. She goes on to say that devising involves “the sharing and shaping of an original product that directly emanates from assembling, editing, and re-shaping individuals’ contradictory experiences of the world” (1994, p. 1). Each participant in devised theatre brings all of their knowledge, and their varied experiences of life to bear on the process of making a new piece of theatre. An important part of the process is learning how to put all these disparate ideas, actions, and experiences together to form a coherent whole. The task of devising is thus two-fold; to assemble many ideas together, and also to edit out what cannot or does not work. In this process, the ideas, experiences, and ‘knowings’ that each participant brings to the floor are shaped and re-shaped in the service of the performance.

Oddey goes on to point out that devising is “a way of working that supports intuition, spontaneity and an accumulation of ideas” (1994, p. 1). The idea of intuition is a very important one in devising; Heddon and Milling go as far as to characterise intuition as a “structuring element” (2006, p. 9) of the devising process. Sometimes it is not clear where an idea comes from – it simply springs forth, fully formed. The devising process not only allows for this kind of spontaneous, intuitive creativity to happen, it creates ideal conditions in which this kind of thinking can emerge. In the devising process, participants can bring all their ideas, whether silly, whimsical, or just plain crazy to the rehearsal floor, where they can be tested, experimented with, and used or abandoned as part of the creative process.

Oddey continues by saying, “The process of devising is about the fragmentary process of understanding ourselves, our culture, and the world we inhabit” (1994, p. 1). This is important to our understanding of devised theatre - it cannot be neutral; it always represents the cultural, social and political understandings of the people who made it. This is because the process of devising draws on what Moll calls “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 2014), as it makes use of all that we know and think about the world. As theatre-makers, we bring our selves into the rehearsal room, and we are in many ways the richest source of inspiration and material. Therefore, devised theatre always serves as a very personal reflection of the people who have made it. As Oddey says, “The process reflects a multi-vision made up of each group member’s individual perception of that world as received in a series of images then interpreted and defined as a product” (1994, p. 1); thus, devised theatre reflects the plurality of voices, opinions, and creative visions of all those that were part of making it. While no piece of theatre can be completely democratic, as it is always necessary for at least one person to operate as the ‘outside eye’ of the director and make choices about what works and what does not, devised theatre certainly allows greater space for multiple voices and realities to be explored in the process of theatre-making.

Oddey goes on to observe that “Participants make sense of themselves within their own cultural and social context, investigating, integrating, and transforming their personal experiences, dreams, research, improvisation, and experimentation” (1994, p. 1). Devising,

therefore, is a process of collaborative meaning-making, where the group, both collectively and individually can explore the meaning(s) of their ideas, experiences, and contexts, and make sense of them through the creative process. She points out that “Devising is about thinking, conceiving, and forming ideas, being imaginative and spontaneous, as well as planning. It is about inventing, adapting and creating what you do as a group” (1994, p. 1). Devising is a way of putting thoughts into action. It is not simply a process of ‘playing’ in the rehearsal room, but rather one of considered, thoughtful *problem-finding* (or problem-making) and *problem-solving* (to use Sawyer’s (2003c; 2007) terminology) through improvisation. Oddey herself goes on to say that “Central to the devising process is problem-solving” (1994, p. 22). This process of finding or making up a problem (often arising from the initial inspiration for the work), and then solving it (through the process of improvisation and rehearsal) involves a high level of cognitive and creative engagement, and demands advanced skills of imagination and synthesis to achieve.

It is therefore clear that devising is a separate and fully-rounded area of theatrical endeavour. It is also distinct from directing, although a devised theatre production does require a director. Thus, a director can be a deviser, but not all directing demands devising skills. The role of the director is to act as the final decider of what works and what doesn’t on stage. In most productions, the director is the final decision-maker, and even in some devised productions, this would be true of the director’s role. However, the directing of a scripted play-text is very different from the process of directing a devised piece; while the skill sets required overlap, the intention behind the work in each of these cases is materially different. In practice, many directors (myself included) work in both devised and scripted modes of theatre. While it may be easy to see a binary between devised and scripted theatre, Oddey cautions against such a simplistic division, reminding us that

Devised theatre is not always in contradistinction to ‘straight’ theatre. Devised work is a response and a reaction to the playwright-director relationship, to text-based theatre, and to naturalism, and challenges the prevailing ideology of one person’s text under another person’s direction. (1994, p. 4)

In some ways, therefore, the art of collaborative theatre-making can constitute an act of subversion, as it works against the dominance of the vision of the playwright and the director in the theatrical act.

## *A Brief History of Devising*

### *1. Early roots*

Despite the fact that devised theatre is a product of the twentieth century, arising primarily out of the political and social ferment of the 1950s and 1960s (Heddon & Milling, 2006), the concept of co-created performance is not a new idea. As early as the sixteenth century in Europe, Commedia-del-Arte troupes worked as cohesive, collaborative groups, co-creating their theatrical products, to be toured and performed in town squares and market places (Brockett, 1979; Zarilli, McConachie, Williams, & Fisher Sorgenfrei, 2006). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the rise of what is commonly termed 'avant-garde theatre' also brought with it a number of collaborative approaches to the art of theatre-making, as is evidenced in the work of Russian constructivist Vsevolod Meyerhold, among others (Braun, 1979, 1982; Innes, 1993). Meyerhold's influence spread to other parts of the world as the century progressed, largely through the work of Berthold Brecht (Gray, 1976; Thompson & Sacks, 2006; Willett, 1977; Willett, 1984), Joan Littlewood (Holdsworth, 2006), and Jerzy Grotowski (1968).

### *2. A theatre of revolt*

During the 1950s and 1960s, Europe and America saw an explosion of collective groups who used collaborative theatre-making techniques in a number of different ways. Heddon and Milling observe that

It seems evident that many of the common conceptions and/or myths of devising that we have inherited arise from the specific political and cultural conditions of the 1950s and 1960s in the West. It is, for example, during the 1950s and 1960s that the process of devising work was considered to be a material expression of political and ideological commitment, and an ideal embodiment of desired aspects of freedom and authenticity. In this respect, devising performance was a practice that echoed other cultural exchanges of the 1950s and 1960s, when there was a steady 'revolt' evident across forms including the work of Beat writers, and of Pop Artists... (2006, p. 13)

In the world of theatre, this 'revolt' was most evident in the work of Joseph Chaikin's **Open Theatre** (Sainer, 1975), Richard Schechner's **The Performance Group** (Bradby & Williams, 1988), and Julian Beck and Judith Malina's **Living Theatre** (Sainer, 1975; Innes, 1993), among others. Along with Peter Brook (1968; 1988; 1993) and Jerzy Grotowski (1968), these ground-breaking companies went on to inspire the work of more recent directors and theatre-makers such as Ariane Mnouchkine, of **Théâtre du Soleil** (Innes, 1993); Lev Dodin and the **Maly Drama Theatre**; Declan Donnellan and Nick Omerod of **Cheek by Jowl**; Elizabeth LeCompte and the **Wooster Group**; Simon McBurney and **Theatre de Complicité**; and Max Stafford-Clark, at the **Royal Court Theatre** (Shepherd, 2009; Shevtsova & Innes, 2009), as well as Tim Etchells and **Forced Entertainment**; Lin Hixon and **Goat Island** (Heddon & Milling, 2006) and Hilary Westlake and **Lumiere and Son** (Oddey, 1994). All of these companies, along with many others from all over the world, made, or continue to make theatrical work using methods of collaboration and co-creation.



### 3. Devising in a South African context

In South Africa<sup>29</sup>, collaborative theatre-making (known here most commonly as ‘workshop theatre’) has had a very important role in the development of what came to be called ‘protest theatre’. Influenced by such people as Grotowski, Brook, and Littlewood<sup>30</sup>, directors such as Barney Simon and Athol Fugard introduced Western processes of devising and improvisation to the multi-racial groups they worked with in spaces like Dorkay House, The Space Theatre in Cape Town, and the Market Theatre in Johannesburg. Working far outside of the mainstream theatre of the time (which consisted of white-only casts, presenting the classics to white-only audiences in theatre spaces that were funded directly by the apartheid government), Fugard, Simon, and their respective collaborators John Kani, Winston Ntshona, Mbongeni Ngema, and Percy Mtwa, were instrumental in popularising this form of devised theatre, mainly through the success of *The Coat* (1967), *Sizwe Bansi is Dead* (1972), *The Island* (1973) (Fugard, 1993) and *Woza Albert!* (1981) (Mthwa, Ngema, & Simon, 1990). Other companies also arose in the late 1970s and 1980s, which used ‘workshopping’ as their primary mode of creation, including Workshop ’71, under the direction of Robert Mshengu Kavanagh (best known for their production *Survival* (1976)), and The Junction Avenue Theatre Company (best known for their devised musical *Sophiatown* (1986)). Most of this workshopped theatre was oppositional towards the Apartheid regime, and presented plays that in some way critiqued the status quo, performed by multi-racial casts, for private, multi-racial audiences. Greg Homann accurately observes that “under apartheid the dominant mode of play making had been

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<sup>29</sup> This very brief discussion of the importance of collaborative theatre-making in South Africa draws upon the work David Coplan (2007), Martin Orkin (1991), Irene Stephanou and Leila Henriques (2005), Temple Hauptfleisch and Ian Steadman (1984) and Geoffrey Davis and Anne Fuchs (1996). Of course, the history of devised theatre in South Africa is complex, and to fully explore its ramifications would require far more space than I am able to give it here.

<sup>30</sup> Barney Simon, in particular, noted the influence of Littlewood on his work, after he worked backstage for her at the Theatre Royal in London (Stephanou & Henriques, 2005).

workshopping and devising” (2015, p. 327). Despite this, however, in the 1990s (after the demise of apartheid) and into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, methods of devising, workshopping, and co-creation have continued to be used by such artists as Lara Foot, Yaël Farber, Mark Fleischmann and Magnet Theatre Company, and Brett Bailey and Third World Bunfight, among others (Middeke, Schnierer, & Homann, 2015). In many ways, devising has become almost characteristic of contemporary South African theatre.

### *Why is devising so popular?*

It is clear that the notion of devised theatre has moved from its position on the margins of theatrical practice in the 1950s and 1960s, to becoming an important part of the mainstream, both in Britain and America (through the huge success of companies such as **The Wooster Group**, **Theatre de Complicité**, **Goat Island**, **Forced Entertainment** and others), and in South Africa. Oddey explains that “In the cultural climate of the early 1990s [the time of writing of her book], the term ‘devising’ has less radical implications” (1994, p. 9). Devising has become increasingly popular amongst theatre-makers in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, and there are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, devising, or collaborative theatre-making, places the actor in the position of being a creative agent in the making of the performance. No longer simply expected to speak the playwright’s words, the actors in a devised piece have the opportunity to have “greater control of the material they [are] performing or [to] in some way [have] a more creative hand in it than was generally accepted” (Simon McBurney, quoted in Shepherd, 2009, p. 76). While most theorists agree that devised theatre cannot be a truly democratic process<sup>31</sup>, it is certainly

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<sup>31</sup> Heddon and Milling critique the idea of devised theatre as democratic, by asking “Is it necessarily the case that devising companies should be non-hierarchical? Were they ever? .... Does a director, who ultimately has the last word, who accepts final responsibility, complicate the notion of non-hierarchical work or democratic participation?” (2006, p. 5.). It seems that in most cases, the director of such a company acts as a visionary leader, who helps to guide and shape the group creative process.

one that gives recognition and space to the creative inputs of all those involved in creating the piece.

The second aspect of the popularity of devised theatre is economic. The simple fact is that for many companies, particularly in South Africa, the cost of paying performance rights, as well as the high cost of mounting a scripted play or musical, is prohibitive. As Govan, Nicholson and Normington observe, “economic need, as well as artistic vision, is held accountable for changing working practices” (2007, p. 5). Making one’s own work often allows actors and directors to create work that is more economically viable, and also allows them to explore stories and styles of performance that may not be available in scripted form.

The third reason for the increasingly central role of devising as a mode of theatrical creation, is its inclusion in the curriculum of many universities and other training institutions; “No longer a ‘fringe’ or ‘underground’ mode of work, devising is taught at school, university and drama school” (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 21). In some ways, devised theatre has become canonical, and certainly in South Africa it occupies a central position in the National Curriculum for Dramatic Arts, and in the curriculum of many University Drama departments<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> At UKZN, students in Drama and Performance Studies at undergraduate level undertake a large number of devised tasks, including projects in Story Theatre, Physical Theatre, Theatre in Education, Theatre for Development, and Postmodern Performance. In fact, students have far less opportunities to grapple with written text, partly because staffing constraints have made it difficult to teach in the very small groups needed for such text-based work.

## *Devising Strategies and Processes*

Despite this acceptance into the mainstream, it remains almost impossible to draw up a definitive style or mode of devising. Govan, Nicholson and Normington observe that

The invented tradition of devised performance has, of course, no single aesthetic or ideological objective; its strategies and methods are indebted to a wide range of cultural fields including political and community theatres, physical theatre, performance and live art. (2007, p. 4)

Most theorists seem to agree with Heddon and Milling when they characterise devising as a “set of strategies” (2006, p. 2) , rather than a definitive method. Each of the companies and directors I have spoken about in this chapter has evolved their own way of working, their own set of strategies that work for them, in their own context. Instead of a ‘one-size-fits-all-approach’, each company is able to work in a way that is situated, immediate, and flexible, reflecting who they are, what concerns them, and their place in the world. Oddey reminds us that devised theatre is “about the relationship of a group of people to their culture, the socio-political, artistic and economic climate, as well as issues or events surrounding them” (1994, p. 23). The only common element that characterises all devised work is that it is “a process for creating performance from scratch, by the group, without a pre-existing script” (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 3). It seems to me that this is why I find devising so useful and enjoyable as a way of making theatre; it allows me to create something from scratch, to tell stories of my own choosing, that enable me to say something about my own ideas, beliefs, and lived experiences, while also enabling me to work collaboratively with others, who also bring their own ideas, beliefs and lived experiences to the process. As Govan, Nicholson and Normington point out, “The appeal of devising performance for practitioners lies in its pliability and porousness” (2007, p. 4). Because there is no definitive method or way of devising, it allows us the freedom to play and experiment in the rehearsal room, as we work together to make something new, out of nothing.

For me, the notion of devising as a *process, or a set of processes*, is of utmost importance. For many companies, the appeal of devising as a theatre-making strategy lies in an emphasis on the process, rather than on the product, and I tend to agree; for me, the ultimate pleasure of the theatre-making process - the moments of 'flow' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) - happens in the rehearsal room. I do love having an audience see what we have made, and for me the product is important, but I feel the most creative satisfaction in the process of making the piece. Oddey observes that

The significance of the process is that it determines the product, and is a unique experience for every different group of people working together. The devising process is about the ways and means of making a theatrical performance; a company chooses how the product is to be created, which involves decisions about the most appropriate process in the light of the intended product. (1994, pp. 11-12)

Thus, any devising process is unique, and will always lead to a unique product that cannot be completely replicated. This is also one of the greatest limitations of theatrical works created through these kinds of collaborative processes; as Oddey remarks,

Devised theatre is transient and ephemeral, which makes the documentation of the form difficult. ... Why would any theatre company want to reproduce a devised play script when it is pertinent and personal to a particular group of people? (1994, p. 21)

The experience of making and performing the original work can never be entirely recreated, and therefore many devised pieces have a very short life, or else can only be performed by the company that made the piece to begin with.

The fact that devised theatre seems to be especially ephemeral, even more so than the scripted play, leads to some difficulties with the study and research of devised theatre. Heddon and Milling explain that

What is impossible to 'recover' is both the live performance and a definitive history of the making of the piece of devised or collaborative work. Although video documentation now gives some experience of a performance, the different medium renders it a different version from the live event. ... Memories of process are also unreliable: Who made which suggestion or initiated a movement that became a moment of performance? (2006, p. 23)

In many ways, this is what this thesis is trying to do – it is my way of trying to understand and document my own collaborative theatre-making process, not to replicate it, but rather to understand its nuances through the lens of a more theoretical and less intuitive process.

Despite this limitation, however, the lure of making one's own work is strong. Devised theatre offers theatre makers (including myself) the opportunity to work from a wide range of source materials, and to use a selection of creative and performative techniques and theatrical 'languages' within the piece. Partly, this results from an often conscious decision not to rely simply on words to tell the story of the piece:

In this conceptualisation, devised performance shows practitioners' interest in exploring physicality before textuality, and in experimental ways of working that emphasise the creative freedom and spontaneity of both performers and spectators. (Govan, Nicholson, & Normington, 2007, p. 8)

The primary generator of performance in devising is improvisation; improvisation serves as a means for playing with existing ideas, and for generating new ones. Thus, in the making of devised work, companies can use source material as inspiration for improvisation, or they can improvise ways in which to perform sections of spoken text based on their source material, or they can use a piece of music or poetry as inspiration for a physical or movement-based improvisation. In fact, most devised theatre makes use of all of these, as well as many other improvisational tools in order to generate the 'text' of the piece. However, improvisation is by no means the only way of generating material;

Although the material for devised performances may be generated through spontaneous improvisation, the processes of working are also likely to include an

eclectic and experimental mix of playing, editing, rehearsing, researching, designing, writing, scoring, choreographing, discussion and debate. (Govan, Nicholson, & Normington, 2007, p. 7)

In my experience, this is certainly true. To the outside eye, I suspect that the process of devising a new work could appear to be completely chaotic, as participants move in and out of phases of work that encompass all the different tasks above. Sometimes, several of these are happening at the same time, and in the same space! Nevertheless, it is generative chaos which, with good direction, can result in surprising and marvellous leaps. To me, however, it is essential that there is a director figure, who can help to shape the chaos into something that has some kind of coherence. Greg Homan speaks of this role as “theatre-makers who serve as dramaturges in the broadest sense and who... facilitate the creation of collective playmaking” (2015, p. 327). The director of devised work does not necessarily have to have the best ideas, but they do need to have the ability to shape and edit what comes out of the chaos of the process, in ways that can make a performance engaging and meaningful. It is also a director and/or a writer’s<sup>33</sup> task to create a script from the improvisation of the rehearsal room, that can then be worked on and polished for performance for an audience.

### *Narrative in Devised Theatre*

Because of the varied nature of how the performance is created, a devised piece often consists of a range of juxtaposed elements including spoken text, dance, physical theatre, live music and song, as well as the use of visual technology such as recorded video, live video, or projected images. While there is no one method or approach to devising a piece of theatre, it is also true that

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<sup>33</sup> Many companies, while not working on scripted plays as such, use the talents of a writer to turn their improvisations into a script. One such example is the work of Caryl Churchill, and the plays she co-created with **Joint Stock** and **Monstrous Regiment**.

One of the similarities that can be detected across different forms of devising is a shared dramaturgical 'style'. ...devising, as a collaborative process of performance-making, potentially enables the production of a different kind of performance structure that in some senses reflects its collaborative creative process – typically compartmented or fragmented, with multiple layers and narratives. (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 221)

Thus, the varied ways in which devising can be approached leads to “fragmented and multilayered structures” (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 221), which reflect the multifarious and varied ways in which each production is made.

This fragmented, multi-layered and textured style of theatre allows for theatre-makers to approach the creation of narrative in a very different way. No longer does a play have to present a coherent, unified narrative. Govan, Nicholson and Normington point to this important aspect of devised theatre;

The fragmentation of narrative, and an implied rejection of the coherent linear narratives often associated with more conventionally scripted plays, is a source of inspiration for practitioners seeking to provoke new ways of seeing. By experimenting with how narratives might be shaped performatively, practitioners have altered perceptions by representing narratives as multiple, open and unstable. (2007, pp. 10-11)

The reasons for this rejection of coherent linear narratives are complex, but reflect the zeitgeist of the period since the mid 1980s

Widespread distrust of narratives was appropriately taken up by contemporary performance makers, who used the processes of collaborative devising to create works which were complex, multi-layered, multi-vocal, and multi-visions, resisting the imposition of any single perspective, answer, or 'truth'. (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 218)



The result of this is that devised theatre plays with the notion of narrative, breaking apart and remaking narrative devices and conventions in order to allow them to tell multiple stories in multiple ways;

... contemporary devisers construct theatrical narratives that are explicitly intended to challenge neat divisions between fictional and real, between secrets and lies, and between imagination and authenticity. ... performance-makers have extended the act of narrative production in ways which trouble and unfix these binaries. (Govan, Nicholson, & Normington, 2007, p. 56)

This 'unfixing' of the traditional binaries of narrative, as well as the use of multiple voices and multiple forms, places devised theatre firmly in the realm of the postmodern.

### *Postmodern and Postdramatic theatre*

Both Heddon and Milling (2006) and Govan, Nicholson and Normington (2007) characterise devised theatre as postmodern, despite the difficulties with defining exactly what 'postmodernism' is. Heddon and Milling attempt to qualify their statement, saying

Whilst the definition of 'postmodernism' remains appropriately contested, it is nevertheless apparent that a certain postmodern aesthetic code has become citable, and through repetition, is assumed to be synonymous with postmodern practice. Adjectives such as contingent, unstable, undecidable, transgressive, disruptive, open, decentred, self-reflexive, knowing, parodic, ironic, intertextual, paradoxical, and fragmented, are just some of the most familiar ones used in relation to 'postmodern performance'. (2006, p. 203)

However, even Heddon and Milling themselves remain somewhat unsatisfied by the simple labelling of all devised theatre as 'postmodern', and I would have to agree with them. To me, what serves as a far more useful classification lies in the work of Hans-Thies Lehmann (1999/2006) who would characterise devised theatre as 'postdramatic'. What does this term mean? Marvin Carlson provides a useful description of this type of theatre:

It normally involves mixing classical texts with all sorts of other material – literary, documentary, and commercial, but mostly contemporary – and has an almost total disregard for traditional dramatic unity or consistency of style, either textual or performative. (2015, p. 581)

Thus, we can understand ‘postdramatic’ theatre to be a theatre that does not obey the time-honoured Aristotelian unities of drama (i.e. space, time, and action), but rather “...feels bound to operate beyond drama, at a time ‘after’ the authority of the dramatic paradigm in theatre” (Lehmann, 1999/2006, p. 27). Postdramatic theatre works in ways that stretch the boundaries of traditional drama, and challenge the hegemony of the dramatic form of the past;

When the progression of a story with its internal logic no longer forms the centre, when composition is no longer experienced as an organizing quality but as an artificially imposed ‘manufacture’, as a mere sham of a logic of action that only serves clichés ... then theatre is confronted with the question of possibilities beyond drama... (Lehmann, 1999/2006, p. 26)

Lehmann himself, in discussing postdramatic theatre, looks to the work of such companies as **Forced Entertainment**, **The Wooster Group**, **Goat Island**, and **Theatre de Complicité**, among others, and creates clear links between the devised work of these companies and what he calls the postdramatic (Lehmann, 1999/2006). Radosavljevic (2013) and Carlson (2015), also characterise much devised theatre as postdramatic, in its rejection of mimesis, its reliance on performative rather than a literary text, its focus on the body as a tool of expression, and its use of “broad means” to address a “broad set of themes” (Radosavljevic, 2013, p. 61).

## Conclusions

Govan, Nicholson and Normington provide a useful summing up with which we can end this general introduction to devising;

Straddling across boundaries, devised performance has the potential to disrupt material, political, aesthetic, and artistic conventions, as well as playing a central role in the landscape of experimental theatre. ... *devising matters* [my emphasis]. Devising performance is socially imaginative as well as culturally responsive, and articulates between the local and the global, the fictional and the real, the community and the individual, the social and the psychological. In these terms, devised performance has a significant part to play in redefining the ways in which debates about theatricality and performativity are enacted and in recognising how they are connected. ... (2007, pp. 194-195)

This points to the importance of devised or collaboratively made theatre in contemporary culture. As they say, “devising matters”; in many ways devising offers theatre-makers the space to play with their most radical and innovative ideas. This is not to say that such innovation cannot happen in the production of a scripted play – it can – but there is certainly something alluring about the freedom that the devised form offers the theatre artist to explore absolutely anything that interests them, in any possible way. For many of us who make devised theatre, this also allows us to work collaboratively in ways that surpass the natural collaboration of all theatrical work;

Performance always unfixes, and the processes of devising also allow for the kind of collective and collaborative action that has the potential to create a renewed sense of belonging in the participants and in audiences. (Govan, Nicholson, & Normington, 2007, pp. 194-195)

Certainly for me, this sense of “a renewed sense of belonging” is critical to my collaborative theatre-making practice; it is in working with others, in making a piece of theatre from scratch, that the deepest magic of the theatre lies.

This then brings us to the discussion of the *FrontLines* Project, which is the key focus of this thesis. In order to understand *how* I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice, I have chosen to focus on this particular project, which has enormous personal and professional significance to me. By examining the project in detail, in the context of the theoretical discussion in this chapter, I am able to gain a more finely wrought understanding of how my collaborative theatre-making practice is carried out.

## Chapter 4

### *Theatre as a verb: The FrontLines Project*

*The act of remembering connects us with the past and alters time. We are living conduits of human memory.*

*The act of memory is a physical act and lies at the heart of the art of the theatre. If the theatre were a verb, it would be 'to remember'. (Bogart, 2001, p. 22)*

*La memoria è il vaccino contro la violenza, il razzismo, l'antisemitismo<sup>34</sup>.  
(Bortoli, 2017, p. 112)*

In considering how I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice, and with reference to the *FrontLines* Project in particular, I am drawn to Ann Bogart's mediation on why she uses theatre as a 'field of action':

Art can expand the definitions of what it means to be human. ... Art demands action from the midst of living and makes a space where growth can happen. ... To me, the world often feels unjust, vicious, and even unbearable. .... I see pain, destructive behaviour, entropy, and suffering. I dislike the damaging behaviour and blindness of the political sphere. I watch wars declared, social injustices that inhabit the streets of my hometown, and a planet in danger of pollution and genocide. I have to *do* something. My chosen field of action is the theatre.  
(Bogart, 2007, pp. 4-5)

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<sup>34</sup> In English, this reads "Memory is a vaccine against violence, racism, anti-Semitism."

This is the philosophical and ontological position behind the *FrontLines* Project; to me, making this piece of theatre was art, activism, requiem, tribute, and remembrance, all wrapped up in one process. As I explained in my RSI:

***FrontLines** really was a whole lot of things, because **FrontLines** was about my interest in war, but from the perspective of a pacifist. Of somebody who doesn't believe in war, and it came out of the fact that my awareness throughout my life, that my grandfather was a prisoner of war. That he lived through the horrors of war, that he would never discuss those horrors of war. So this sense of not knowing his story, and I still don't know his story, really. I mean I know the outlines of it but I don't know and that's, it's sad in a way. But I think **FrontLines** expressed a whole lot of stuff<sup>35</sup>.*

In many ways, *FrontLines* was a culmination for me of many of the enduring themes of my life, and it became a project that surpassed any other piece of theatre I have ever been involved with in terms of its importance to me. Tamar, Marié-Heleen and I described it in 2012 as,

... an ongoing collaborative performance project, started in 2009, that has included students and staff from the drama departments at the University of KwaZulu-Natal (Durban) (UKZN), the Durban University of Technology (DUT), and the University of Pretoria (UP).... Using conflicts of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as a structural frame, the production seeks to create an imagistic narrative, employing text, dance, music, and visuals to engender an evocative and critically engaging work of theatre. (Coetzee, Meskin, & Van der Walt, 2014, p. 73)

The *FrontLines* Project has had several different iterations; we first devised the piece over a four-week period in 2009, with a group of 47 students from UKZN and DUT. It was

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<sup>35</sup> In presenting the data generated in my RSI and my interviews, I have chosen to italicize direct quotations in this manner.

presented in the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre at UKZN's Howard College Campus in September 2009. In March 2010, we were asked to reprise the work as part of the programme of the 'Art and Social Justice' International Conference, hosted by DUT. This version of the piece had a smaller cast of 27 students, was shorter than the original version<sup>36</sup>, and was presented at DUT's Courtyard Theatre. Later in 2010, our version of *FrontLines* served as the inspiration for *FrontLines: The Remix*. This piece, which bore little resemblance to our work, was devised by three ex-students of UKZN, all successful artists in their own right<sup>37</sup>. In August 2011, Marié-Heleen Coetzee invited Tamar and I to bring a small group of students from UKZN and DUT to Pretoria, to work with her students at UP to mount a new production of *FrontLines*. In each of the versions that we have mounted, the production has evolved and changed, depending on the cast members, the space, and the social and political imperatives of the time – sadly, with the world being what it is, there is never a shortage of new material<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>36</sup> The 2009 version was a mammoth three and a half hours long! Since then, each successive version has become shorter, as we have continued to edit and reshape the material.

<sup>37</sup> I have chosen in this thesis not to write about this iteration of the project in any detail. This is for a number of reasons, but the most important of these is that while I was at many of the rehearsals, I did not feel that I was actually a collaborator in the work at all. The three artists who had asked to make the piece, based on our work, had never in fact seen our work. It would be inappropriate therefore, for me to comment on their processes as it was apparent that the new work they were making had virtually no relation to ours. For ethical reasons, and because they did not participate in my study, I have chosen not to make their names public here.

<sup>38</sup> Tamar and I are now thinking of creating a smaller, touring version of the work that could travel to schools.

## *Finding the material*

As I have already mentioned, the starting point of the *FrontLines* Project was a book given to my husband for Christmas, *An Unpopular War; from afkak to bosbefok*<sup>39</sup> (Thompson, 2006). Upon reading it, I could immediately see that the stories it told, personal reminiscences of the Border War, could make for an engaging piece of theatre. I mentioned the book to Tamar and Marié-Heleen while we were attending the Drama for Life conference in 2008, but it was only the following year that Tamar and I would return to it as a point of impetus for our new project. The book served as inspiration for a series of questions: What is history? How is it made? Where do we 'fit' in this historical narrative? What is its pertinence in today's world? Metaphorically - what does the map of the old world look like, what might new maps reveal? It was in seeking answers to these questions that the theatrical work evolved;

*FrontLines* as a performance piece grew out of a desire to examine how war and violence impact on the lived realities of individuals in multiple contexts; in particular, we were concerned to explore the experiences of individuals rather than countries, the narratives of people rather than politics. .... challenging notions of dominant historical discourses by offering alternative multiple histories that have often been unspoken. We wanted to bring micro-narratives of actual people – perpetrators and victims – to the stage in order to offer an

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<sup>39</sup> The literal translation of this is 'from shitting-off, to fucked-up by the bush'. The word 'afkak' was widely associated with the physical hardships of basic training, at the beginning of a soldier's National Service, while the word 'bosbefok' was used to describe those that had been 'on the Border' for too long, and who were demonstrating signs of traumatic stress due to the nature of their activities in the vicious bush war being waged. Thus, this subtitle bookends the experiences of the average South African conscript of the period.



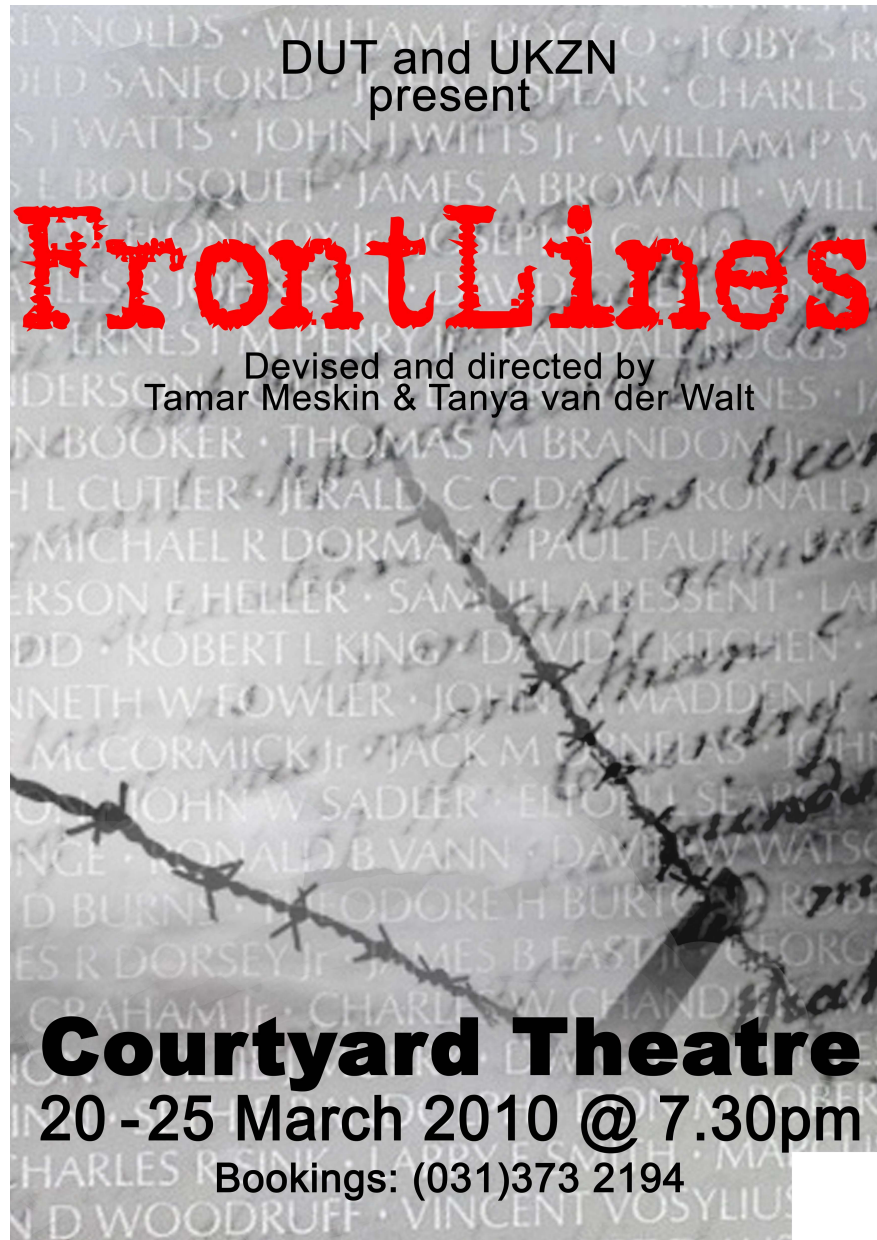
alternative to the dominant historical discourses of war. (Coetzee, Meskin, & Van der Walt, 2014, p. 81)

At first, we looked at the material from J.H. Thompson's book as the basis for our piece, but quickly realised that we would need more to work from, partly because the reminiscences contained in the book could not provide enough scope for our respective student bodies. We then decided to look at the history of war as a whole, toying with the notion of beginning with the Trojan War, and working our way through history, but it was almost immediately apparent that this would be unmanageable. After mulling over the matter, we decided rather to focus our attention on the period from the beginning of the First World War up to our present, which gave us a spread of about 100 years to play with; the production therefore included "...the two World Wars, Vietnam, the South African border wars, the anti-apartheid struggle, genocide, terrorism, the Holocaust, xenophobia, Eastern European wars, Afghanistan, Iraq, and the numerous recent conflicts throughout Africa" (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010a, p. 174). We then started to think about the material that we could use; a chance remark by one of Tamar's colleagues led us to the books of Andrew Carroll (1997; 2001; 2006)<sup>40</sup>, and suddenly we knew where our material would come from; we would use personal letters and reminiscences of those affected by war. Having always been fascinated by war, probably because my grandfather had suffered so terribly as a prisoner of war in the Second World War, and because of a voracious interest in the social and political events of the 1960s, I also had a large number of books that I thought

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<sup>40</sup> Andrew Carroll's work in preserving war letters is extraordinary. In 1998 he founded The Legacy Project, and began collecting letters, primarily from the USA to begin with. His work aims to preserve war letters before they are thrown away or lost to later generations. Later, his search for war letters expanded to Europe, the Balkan States, Afghanistan, and other theatres of war. His collection has given rise to a number of edited anthologies, three of which we used in making *FrontLines*. In 2013, he donated his personal collection of over 100 000 letters to establish **The Centre for American War Letters**, based at Chapman University in California. See <http://www.chapman.edu/research-and-institutions/cawl/index.aspx>.

could help us in the making of the work. The idea of using letters also led us to the title of the piece; the *FrontLines* refers not only to the frontlines of battle, but also to 'lines from the Front', the letters sent home by soldiers all over the world.



*Figure 11: One of the publicity posters designed by our friend and collaborator, Stephen Woodroffe.*

Coincidentally, at the time Tamar and I were also preparing for a work trip/holiday in Europe. Before we left, we held lengthy auditions, so that we had some idea of the cast we would have to work with once rehearsals began. We packed our bags with books and

material for the project, and set off. During my interview with Tamar, we talked about the importance of this trip in the genesis of the project:

*TAMAR: If I think about how it evolved, I mean I think about things like sitting on that train going from Nice to I can't even remember where. It was the Nice to Italy leg, so it must be Nice to Milan. And I was sitting with that book of letters and the back of my Sudoku panels and tearing out pages... I think about going to the Imperial War Museum, for example, and as we walked through that museum, all those ideas that were germinating. And looking at, I remember Wilfred Owen's poems in that drawer, and as you're going through it, and you're kind of noting to yourself and you're thinking okay, that, that's an image, or I say to you or you say to me, almost like bookmark that in your head, that, that's something.*

*TANYA: Yes. I mean I have a recollection of us sitting on the train from Madrid to Barcelona, that high-speed train, and us coming up with a whole lot of ideas then and reading the books, and really sort of like nailing things down.*

*TAMAR: Yes, and we were bookmarking things and talking, and drawing connections. So thinking.... and because we'd read them separately and then we started talking about which were the things that we both thought were going to be interesting.*

*TANYA: And I think part of the success for FrontLines was the fact that we'd been to Europe for those three weeks, that we'd had those three weeks together, and it wasn't the only thing we talked about...*

*TAMAR: Sure. But we'd spent a lot of time thinking about it.*

*TANYA: We spent a lot of time working on it and mulling things over, and spent a lot of time just talking through things and sort of thinking together...*

This extended period of time spent 'thinking together' allowed us to extend the range of material we were using to include eye witness reports, newspaper articles, personal testimonies, and other factual sources.

To give an idea of the kind of letters we found, I have included the following, one of my favourites from the production:

Dear Dick

You were my first born. With your laughing eyes and mischievous grin, you stole my heart. I remember you as a little boy – the forts you built, the adventures you took, the “rescued” critters you brought home – and the friends that surrounded you. I’ll never forget, when you were twelve years old, you stood so proudly beside me as they played taps for your dad, and gave us his flag. ...

Captured forever in my mind, is the image of your final hug, as you raced for the plane that would take you to Vietnam. ... I found out later – on June 6, 1968, you were on team with some South Vietnamese soldiers, and your group was pinned down under fire. You were hit several times before you died. You were only 19 years old. ...

It’s been a long time my son. I still miss you. I will always miss you. Sometimes I look at your friends that you went to school with, and I wonder what you would be like now; what my grandchildren would have been like. But you will never come back. You’re gone forever. ...

We go to the Vietnam Memorial whenever we can. ... when I go to the Wall, it’s almost like you’re there with me. Each time I run my fingers over your name on that cold, granite wall, I can feel the warmth of your laughter as if you are saying, “It’s OK, Mom. I’m here.” I know I will never hold you in my arms again. But I will forever hold you close to my heart because you will always be my firstborn – my shining star.

Love, Mom (Carroll, 2001, pp. 440-441)



*Figure 12: Tamika Sewnarain performing "Dear Dick". Photographs by Val Adamson<sup>41</sup>.*

Spoken simply by a single actress "Dear Dick" was one of the most emotionally charged moments of the performance for me. In fact, it became a standing joke among the cast that I cried every time this piece was spoken, both in rehearsal and in performance. As the mother of sons, the emotional resonance of the piece, which reminds me of my deep love for my own children, continues to reinforce my connection to this particular moment of the work.

While these letters formed the 'spine' of the work, and the majority of the material, we also used first-person testimonies of war. Some of these were gleaned from newspaper reports, others from a variety of other sources including autobiographies. One of my

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<sup>41</sup> All production photographs are used with permission. As these photographs were all used in publicity for the production and are already in the public domain, informed consent was not needed for their use in this thesis.

favourite examples of this kind of material came from Michael Herr's seminal book about the Vietnam War, *Dispatches* (1978):

The war ended, and then it really ended, the cities 'fell', I watched the choppers I'd loved dropping into the South China Sea as their Vietnamese pilots jumped clear, and one last chopper revved up, lifted off and flew out of my chest.

I saw a picture of a North Vietnamese soldier sitting in the same spot on the Danang River where the press centre had been. . . He looked so unbelievably peaceful, I knew that somewhere that night and every night there'd be people sitting together over there talking about the bad old days . . . Vietnam Vietnam Vietnam, we've all been there. (Herr, 1978, p. 207)

For me, pieces of testimony like this were enormously important, as they added the weight of my own personal interests and obsessions to the work we were making. Along with the letters and the testimonies, we also found many war poems, including Wilfred Owen's *Dulce et Decorum Est.*, Carol Ann Duffy's *The Big Ask* (a poem about the 'war on terror'), John McCrea's *In Flanders Fields*, Goran Simic's *The Face of Mourning* (a poem about the war in Bosnia), Gillian Clarke's *Listen* (a poem about Afghanistan), and Laurence Binyon's iconic *For the Fallen* (1914).

Another example of the material we gathered during our European trip was that in the Imperial War Museum, we came upon an exhibition of First World War-era recruitment posters. I took a series of photographs of these, and they were later used as the basis for an improvised 'Recruiting' sequence. Tamar commented on this when I interviewed her:

*I remember specifically we were looking at the posters, and as we walked through and we said we've got to take pictures of these posters because we're going to use these posters and it's going to be the starting point for a section in the piece. And we didn't know exactly what it would be, but we knew that we were going to use that somewhere.*



Figure 13: A selection of the recruiting posters. Photographs from my private collection.

A further important moment during this trip happened when we saw The National Theatre's extraordinary production of *War Horse*. After the final curtain call, Tamar and I simply sat, stunned by the beauty and the genius of the production. Later, we used one of the traditional songs from *War Horse* in our work<sup>42</sup>, and it has always seemed to me that something of the texture of the *FrontLines* Project was inspired by *War Horse*, despite the fact that they are vastly different pieces of theatre.

In addition, there was a very personal aspect to the material we assembled for the production, particularly inspired by our own grandfathers' experiences of the war. My grandfather, Henry Eric du Plessis, was captured by the Germans at Sidi Rezegh in the North African desert, in 1940. He was first taken to Italy as a prisoner of war, but when the Allies invaded, he and his fellow-prisoners were marched to what was then Czechoslovakia, to an area that now lies in the Czech Republic. There, they were held captive, and forced to work in a coal mine. He was liberated at the end of the war, and had to spend several months in England recuperating, before being able to board a ship back to South Africa. While I was

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<sup>42</sup> The song we used is entitled *Only Remembered for What We Have Done*.

aware that he had been a prisoner, he almost never spoke about his experiences with me (or with any of the family), even when I was an adult and asked him to recount his memories. He died in 2000<sup>43</sup>, so I was not able to interview him for the *FrontLines* Project, but my grandmother, at almost 90, was still able to remember much of what had happened. I asked her to write down for me what she could remember of his experiences, as well as her own wartime experiences. When she replied, in a neatly typed letter, she also included a few copies of newspaper clippings, reporting on my grandfather's condition during the war. We used some of these reminiscences during the action of the performance.



*Figure 14: My grandfather, Henry Eric du Plessis.*

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<sup>43</sup> He died long before we made *FrontLines*, but my work on the production has always been, and continues to be, dedicated to his memory.



By Alan Nash.

That fatal depression of Sidi Rezegh was untenanted under the winter gales for four days after the battle, except by death and the everlasting memory of the Fifth Brigade. Then the Dukes crossed it, and among the litter of abandoned equipment and broken vehicles and burned-out panzers saw the proofs of the Fifth Brigade's heroism.

There was an anti-tank gun that had been fought from its porte. On the porte were four bodies. The crew of that type of gun was four.

The Fifth Brigade's artillery sent almost the last message from the breaking brigade. The guns were hampered as the afternoon drew on by want of ammunition. The message ordered the ammunition column ten miles away not to risk its load of shells by attempting to break through to the guns. The gunners fought on until they were dead or their last rounds expended, and few of them escaped.

Our one regret is that we have to work under ground. It has not yet snowed much, but it is terribly cold, the ground is frozen cold every morning. I am feeling very fit and well. Please send plenty of soap and chocolate in your next parcel. Regards to all enquiring friends.

The following ex-prisoners of war from Germany will return on the same train from Pretoria to-morrow: L/Cpl. C. B. Louw, of Parow, and S/Sgt. Mongiè, of Maitland.

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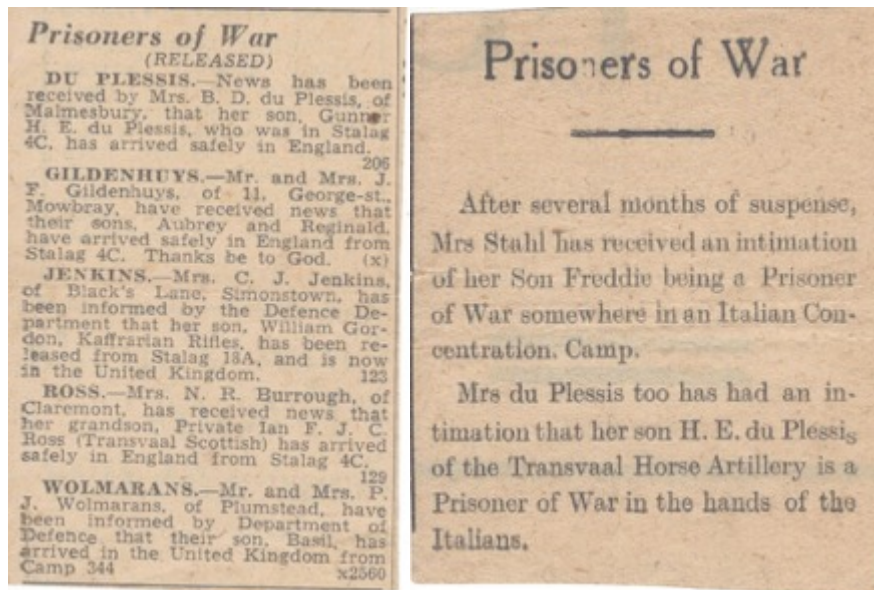


Figure 16: Newspaper clippings giving details of my grandfather's time as a POW.

Tamar's grandfather, Lionel Meskin, had also been a prisoner of war, and as a Jew had even been interred at Auschwitz for a time. He managed to escape the death camps, and during his life had written reams of poems about his memories of the war. Tamar's mother excavated these from her archives and made them available to us, and in the final version of the production we made use of two of his poems.

In addition to all the collected and found material, we also generated some of the material through guided writing tasks with the cast. One example of this is when we asked the cast to complete the sentence "When I make the map of my new world...". The responses to this task were used in one of the final sequences of the performance, and included such statements as

When I make the map of my new world I draw no boundaries, I draw no borders.  
No lines on my masterpiece; just colour everywhere.

When I make the map of my new world I will use the past as my path, because  
it's important to know where you are coming from in order to go forward.

When I make the map of my new world, I will be tempted to erase the lines  
which have caused the skirmish,

which has, in turn, caused  
the battle  
which has caused  
the war  
which has caused  
the lives of so many to be lost.

When I make the map of my new world

It won't be geographical perhaps not even physical  
It will be my world, our world  
My map would not be perfect  
It would be torn and cracked and crumpled  
It would show age and character  
Perhaps my old world just had botox  
To smoothen out the wrinkles  
The conflict  
Making my world just feel new within.

When I make the map of my new world

I will ensure that the borders run through old battlefields  
As reminders of the blood lost  
The lines we must never cross again  
When I make the map of my new world  
I will tear down the walls.

When I make the map of my new world, I will not make it alone. One man on  
his own cannot change the world. When I make the map of my new world, I

will start with the map of my heart. When I write the map of my heart, I will use pencil so when I make my mistakes I know I can rub it out and start again.

When I make the map of my new world there'll be no  
borders, no boundaries, no fences. . .  
no pounds, no dollars, no cents  
it'll all make sense, believe me  
there'll be no races, no losers, none beneath me  
no latitude, just the right attitude to love in  
magnitude  
now: now just gotta find a large enough piece of paper ...

(in Meskin & Van der Walt, 2009/ 2010/ 2011, pp. 42-43)



*Figure 17 Lungani Malo [L] and Sarah Colpepper [R] speaking their sections of "The Map of My New World". Photographs by Val Adamson.*

We also included other pieces written by students, some created during the rehearsal process itself. One example was created after a cast member asked if we would be interested in using some rap poetry/music in the production. When we said yes, he and a small group of friends went off for half an hour, and came back to us with the following piece, set to a simple guitar riff:



Chorus: I' m just waiting to go to war. . .  
 Kill a soldier make his whole family sore . . . (X4)

Soloist: Wait . . .I'm actually going to kill that. . .  
 Means that I'm gonna be a murderer . . . that's fact . . .  
 This ain't a play . . . there's no second or third act . . .  
 Just one scene of blood spills and that's that . . .  
 Killing is winning and winning is all that . . .  
 Losing is not an option . . . see that's whack . . .  
 Kill a few people and head right on back . . .  
 Home . . . have a celebration wearing top hats . . .  
 Rats in trenches . . . I eat here. . .  
 Mud on trousers . . . I sleep there . . .  
 Cold or hot air . . . it's not fair . . .  
 Just go there . . . if you die there . . . they don't care . . .  
 So . . . why am I going to kill Bill. . . ?  
 Or John . . . whatever his name is . . . he's young still . . .  
 Got a whole life ahead of him at God's will . . .

Chorus: So . . . why am I going to war?  
 I don't want to kill a soldier make his  
 Family sore . . . (X3)

Soloist: So . . . why am I going to war?  
 I don't want to wait anymore . . .

(Nhlakanipho Manqele, in Meskin & Van der Walt, 2009/ 2010/ 2011, p. 10)



*Figure 18. [From L to R] Nhlakanipho Manqele, Kirsten Holder, Abulele Njisane, Immaculate Lihle Cele, and Pieter de Beer perform the rap piece that they had improvised. Photograph by Val Adamson.*

The same student, Nhlakanipho, was a very talented writer and also brought us a poem he had written about the Soweto Riots, and June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976. At first he seemed reluctant to share the poem with us, and seemed astounded when we immediately included it in the section of work about Soweto.



*Figure 19: June 16th 1978. In performing this section, we used the iconic photograph of Hector Pietersen taken on that fateful day as an inspiration for this still tableaux, which served as the backdrop for the speaking of Nhlakanipho's poem. [From L to R] Siphosenkosi Myeni, Wiseman Mncube, Sinenhlanhla Cele, and [in arms] Sifiso Ndlovu. Photograph by Val Adamson.*

We then asked Nhlakanipho to write a poem for the section on the Middle East and Jerusalem. Tamar provided him with some source material to read, we held lengthy group discussions in rehearsal, and then he went away and produced the following, which was used as the anchor point for this section of the work:

How long will God's city suffer by the hands of God's people?  
 How long will you have people die for you?  
 In you?  
 By you?  
 While you...stand forever more as the city of peace?  
 You have people rest in peace, for peace. Is peace  
 What you truly stand for?

Is peace what your land's for?  
 Or is it what I lose a hand for?  
 Arm for?  
 Harm more...is what you do to bury bodies instead  
 Of farm more...  
 Nothing grows...for the higher it goes it blows when  
 Your bombs explode...  
 There is one God for all...  
 One father to call...  
 No man should fall...  
 From a soldier who crawls...  
 Your children should crawl...  
 To walk on tall...  
 Learn all from boards on wall to wall...  
 God made you whole and made you fare...  
 Then halved that whole to make you fair...Have  
 9 parts beauty and 9 parts pain...  
 But the ratio's changed from tears that rain...the pain  
 Beats beauty again and again in vain...  
 When will the city of peace rest in peace? Or rest in pieces?  
 (Nhlakanipho Manqele, in Meskin & Van der Walt, 2009/ 2010/ 2011, pp. 13-14)

When I interviewed him, I asked Nhlakanipho how he had felt when we had decided to use his work:

*TANYA: What did it mean to you, or how did it feel to you when we used your piece about Jerusalem?*

*NHLAKANIPHO: I felt, first of all I was honoured, that's the very first feeling that I felt, was like: "Wow this is a great honour I mean, they using my piece," and I actually felt that I'm good as a poet there. I've always heard people say it, but I've never really done it professionally. And for it to be placed in a professional*



*scape, I was like: “Wow that’s very good for me,” and I guess it spoke to you as well because I don’t think you would have used it if it didn’t.*

*TANYA: Ja, because we actually used two of your pieces, because you wrote the June 16th piece as well didn’t you?*

*NHLAKANIPHO: Oh yes, yes. Wow you also used that! Yeah, you guys allowed me to be in touch with a side of myself that I didn’t know I had, which allowed me to write all those pieces. Yes, the June 16 wasn’t written for Frontlines per say, but the Jerusalem piece was, and through all the things that you guys were teaching us in the process of rehearsing and putting the project together, it allowed me to reach that. So the fact that my voice was also going to be heard....*

Nhlakanipho was not the only student to contribute to the text in this way; in each version, we have encouraged students to bring us pieces they have written, or have tasked specific students who have shown interest and promise as writers, with writing for specific moments in the performance. While it would be impossible to include all of these here, the pieces discussed above serve to show how we used both found material and newly written pieces to construct the text of the work.

The composition of the work, and our choices as to which material to include or leave out, were also contingent and changed from version to version:

The material developed along with the work; in each version, new stories were added reflecting the contemporary circumstances in which we found ourselves.... Thus, the work itself attains a quasi-dialogic status, responding to the dynamics of any given moment in ways that shift the work to create a piece with resonances of the earlier ones and layered with intertextual tropes, but nonetheless a new product. (Coetzee, Meskin, & Van der Walt, 2014, p. 82)

This also applied to the pieces that students had written themselves. In some cases, the pieces contributed by individual students have remained constant in the text of the work, but in other cases we have decided to change or rewrite certain pieces if the original author is no longer in the cast. One example of this is the “Map of my New World” section, which

was completely rewritten when we made the Pretoria version. This was because we wanted this section to reflect the thoughts and feelings of the new cast, and also because we wanted to include the guided writing exercise as part of the creative process of rehearsing in Pretoria. Another key example is the work of an American exchange student, who played a very important role in the first iteration of *FrontLines*. She was a visiting MA student, who proved to be an excellent writer and improviser, and was the origin of many ideas during that initial creative process. She contributed two key pieces of written material to the first iteration of the *FrontLines* Project, related to her experience as an American in Africa. Despite the brilliance of her writing, in later versions where this particular student was no longer in the cast, we omitted these pieces from the text because we felt that they were so very personal to her particular experience that we could not allow them to be spoken by someone else. In other cases, though, we chose to retain the material; the American student had also brought us a piece written by a close friend, an American Muslim man, in response to the events of 9/11. When she left the cast, we consulted with her as to whether we could continue to use this piece, and she confirmed that her friend was happy for us to do so. For this reason, his testimony has remained part of the text of the work.

## *Stylistic and Structural Choices*

### *1. Narrative choices*

The vast amount of material we had gathered meant that we had to make very clear choices in terms of the style of the work, and in how we would structure the piece. Stylistically, the breadth of material was a huge challenge: how to translate “lived history into a performance frame” (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010b, p. 127). As we have explained,

We initially considered working the material into a single narrative with a linear structure, but very soon rejected the idea for a variety of reasons. Firstly, the scope of the narrative mitigated against such a potentially reductive strategy, being too varied in style and content to allow for a singular narrative to be

constructed. Secondly, the nature of the material is so extreme, that we believed it needed a degree of stylistic and imaginative distance in order for it to communicate to an audience. How does one tell the story of the Holocaust or of the Rwandan genocide in a way that does not reduce its significance? How does the artist convey the immensity of the idea without inuring the audience to it by making the horror too overt? In answering these questions, we decided to employ an anti-realistic style that would allow us to engage the material with a degree of aesthetic distance which would work in a Brechtian way, seeking to move the audience emotionally but simultaneously to engage them critically. (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010a, p. 177)

Thus, we chose in *FrontLines* to reject the idea that one can tell the 'Grand Narrative' of war in any convincing way on the stage; rather, we were interested in telling small, personal narratives; the kind of stories that are often obscured in the larger narrative of war, which is coloured by the politics of the time. In telling these personal narratives which we had gleaned from our material, we allowed ourselves, the cast and the audience to reconsider and reimagine their understanding of history. When we met with Kamini and Brandon, Tamar and I talked about this aspect of the work:

*TAMAR: We're so used to the construction of beginning, middle and end. Follow a story that's realistic, psychological realism, through the arc, and **FrontLines** of course broke that completely. I mean partly, because we couldn't think of a story!*

*TANYA: Exactly! We can't find a story.*

*TAMAR: How do we put a story to this?*

*TANYA: Because you can't, we can't find a narrative...*

*TAMAR: But actually that opens up the possibilities to really explore other ways of making meaning than pure psychological realism.*

In making meaning in the *FrontLines* Project we focussed on creating a fragmented, non-linear, personalised narrative. In addition, we also made use of different performance styles and forms, to create the final product

The style of the work resonates within the postmodern ethos... The work utilizes a technique of layering through juxtaposition, collage, and fragmentation in framing its content, as well as negotiating the relationship between theatre and testimony. .... we attempted to create a multifocal perspective, layering various modes of representation in order to generate the holistic aesthetic experience... we juxtapose a piece of text with a dance piece, or underscore a poem with music, and the like, while also creating a visual accompaniment using the images gleaned from our research. (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010a, pp. 179-180)

The idea of layering was an integral part of what we were trying to do; by abandoning the notion of a 'Grand Narrative', and choosing instead to focus on individual stories, the work took of the nature of a quilt, made of many different pieces each with their own texture and nuance, stitched together to form a whole. Devaksha talked at length about how much she had admired this layering, from her perspective as a Stage Manager:

*I don't know if it's something I learned because I don't think I've been able to achieve it but, we used to just... I would admire the vision, because I would see it all, so I would see the monologue, the music, the dancing, the power point at the back, the video, and I would marvel at how did you create that in your mind, so I think maybe it's a learning, that your minds were thinking like that ...*

## **2. Structural choices**

In stitching this quilt together, we had to find some kind of organising principle for the material, and a structural frame for the work. This was extremely difficult; we had so much material, and it was impossible at first to see how we could construct a skeleton for the piece that would allow it to make sense to the audience. When I met with Lauren and Devaksha, we discussed this process, and how the structure of the work had evolved:

TANYA: *We didn't really have an idea of what it would look like but, we knew the kind of things we wanted to say and the kind of stories we wanted to tell. And we knew we didn't want to tell a single narrative, because we thought it wasn't*

*going to be big enough. So finding the letters and things really did help us....*

*DEVAKSHA: I think it also comes from, you guys had that structure. Once you had that structure of the chapters and the ... that put it together I think.*

*TANYA: I've got the most amazing photograph of my table in my braai area<sup>44</sup> covered in piles of paper with rocks on them, 'cause the wind was blowing, and we'd sat and we'd come up with that structure and we took the whole pile of material that we kind of separated out, and it ended up, well the holocaust pile was about this big all by itself, and we were like, how do we do this, there is no way to tell this story, there's no... this is a whole play by itself ... but, I have this classic photograph of the table with all these piles of paper with the rocks and like chapter 1, chapter 2, chapter 3 written on them, so that did help us, it really did, once we found that then we could... kind of... come up with something. But, I mean we didn't have that structure when we started rehearsing, we hadn't finalised that yet.*



*Figure 20. The "Stones" - Dividing up the material into Chapters, Chronicles and Meditations at my home on a Sunday afternoon. Photographs from my personal collection.*

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<sup>44</sup> What is called a barbeque in most parts of the world, is called a 'braai' in South Africa. The space I am referring to here is an outdoor entertainment area.

The piece begins and ends with the idea of the map, and “the notion that it is the lines on maps that metaphorically cause wars: cartography has a lot to answer for” (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010a, p. 174). This was a critically important idea, one which was sparked by Richard Dowden’s observation that

The European Union has only 23 languages. Africa has at least 2000, and between 6000 and 10,000 political or social entities...Africans played no part in the creation of their nation states. Their boundaries were drawn on maps in Europe, by Europeans who had never been to Africa, with no regard for existing political systems and boundaries. Half a century later Africans were given flags and national anthems, airlines and armies, and told they were now independent. (Dowden, 2009, p. 52)

To express this idea dramatically, we bookended *FrontLines* with two sections entitled ‘The Maps of the Old World’ and the afore-mentioned ‘Map of My New World’. Tamar wrote the former, while the latter, as we have already seen, was generated through a guided writing activity. We then set about arranging the material into a three-pronged narrative, based on Chapters, Chronicles and Meditations:

- Chapters were made up mostly of letters, and drew the rough narrative arc of any soldier’s journey through war, from Setting Off, through Leaving, Training, Waiting, Fighting, Doubting, Winning and Losing, Longing, Dying, Returning and Remembering.
- Chronicles – one for each month of the year – reflected upon actual historical events from across the world. Thus, January recalls the Tet Offensive of the Vietnam War, February recalls the bombing of Dresden, while April recalls the Fall of Saigon, and September recalls the events of 9/11. Some months had more than one event associated with them; June recalls both the Soweto riots of June 16 1978, and the protests in Tiananmen Square, while July recalls the battles of the Somme and Passchendaele, as well as the events at Srebrenica during the Balkan conflict.
- The meditations reflect on key aspects of the work that we felt could not be dealt with in either the Chapters or the Chronicles. These include the conflict

in the Middle East, centred around the image of the city of Jerusalem; Africa, and the many ongoing conflicts which tear the continent apart; and the Holocaust, which we felt could not be adequately dealt with in any kind of realistic form, and which we approached in a stylized and expressionistic way. In addition, we included a meditation based on a long poem called 'The Soldier' which we had drawn from an earlier production that Tamar had devised, and adapted it for *FrontLines*. In each case, the meditations embodied for us an 'untellable' story, as Tamar and I discussed:

*TAMAR: Yes, even things like when we were doing the holocaust section and not wanting to do it...*

*TANYA: Overtly.*

*TAMAR: And making the choice to do it through voice-overs or through images or...*

*TANYA: Because it's an impossible story to tell.*

*TAMAR: Yes, or like trying to tell the narrative of the Middle East, realising that you can't tell that story in any kind of way that you can engage it other than...*

*TANYA: There's no way to tell it that's a-political.*

*TAMAR: Yes, other than imagistically and trying to make the complexity... visible.*

This complex structure allowed us to tell multiple stories and embody multiple points of view, by linking the various pieces of source material either thematically (for the Chapters and the Meditations), or chronologically (for the Chronicles).

### *3. Visual Choices*

In addition to the many different types of textual material, the stylistic choices for the production also included the music and the visuals which accompanied the live action. Both the music and the photographs used in the production helped us to juxtapose and to

counterpoint the mood and the meaning of the spoken text. The visual impact of the piece was vital to the complete experience<sup>45</sup>; the action was played out in front of three large screens onto which were projected an almost continuous stream of images which served to counterpoint, juxtapose, and comment on the live performed action.



*Figure 21. The three screens are clearly visible in the background to this photograph, taken of the first version, performed at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre at UKZN. In each version, we have had to change the way that we have positioned the screens, due to constraints of the theatre space. Photograph by Val Adamson.*

The process of collecting these images happened while we were rehearsing. Each day, I would come home from rehearsal, and add to the list I had given my husband, a list of

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<sup>45</sup> Our paper entitled *Photography, archaeology and representation: chronicles of conflict and the architecture of action* (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010b) discusses our use of visual images in far greater depth than I am able to do here.



places, names, and dates. He then spent hours searching the Internet, while Tamar and I searched through books of conflict photography, finding the strongest images for our work. In my meeting with Devaksha and Lauren, I explained the process:

*Johan [my husband] sat and collected images... I mean the final thing had over a thousand images. We had probably about 4 or 5 thousand images that he'd found, that we just sat and went through. We sat for three nights, we sat until 3 o'clock in the morning with three laptops on our dining room table, putting those things together and saying, okay now what happens next? Or, this happens, so what kind of pictures, what do we need behind it, what's going to work for us in terms of a visual echo or something to give it texture or mood...*

In this way, we put together three separate PowerPoint presentations, which would run simultaneously throughout the action of the play. The largest of these had 187 slides in it, which gives some idea of the vast number of images that the audience had to grapple with. Tamar and I discussed the magnitude of the visual task:

TAMAR: *I mean originally, we battled with the idea of having the three screens and we had to sit up all... I'll never forget sitting up all night with Johan on one, and me on another one, and you on another one, and all three of us were... it was insanity.*

TANYA: *And sitting at three in the morning thinking if we can just push through we'll finish it, but we've got to go to sleep at some point.*

TAMAR: *I mean it was sheer insanity ... And actually, probably it would have been fine with one, but it was so much better with three.*

We also chose not to shy away from using some very brutal images; we felt that we could not make the impact of war 'pretty', and that the power of some of these very disturbing images was an important part of the impact of the work as a whole,

The brutality of images of real war offered multiple potential juxtapositions which reinforced the narrative imperatives of the work. Simultaneously, the

presence of the photographic montage ensured that the reality of the conflicts being spoken of was constantly made present, preventing the audience from subsiding into a passive response where the action can be distanced as fiction. Thus, the use of the physical performance models juxtaposed with the visual score created the central methodology driving the devising of the work, through combinations and connections between text, movement, music and image. (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010b, p. 132)

One of the most powerful moments in the rehearsal process for all of the different versions of the piece has been the point at which we have allowed the cast to sit in the auditorium and actually see the images that were playing out behind their words and actions. Every time we have done this, the visceral impact on the cast has been palpable; when we showed the first cast these images, only days before the production opened, many of them were moved to tears. Others went away and found even more images for us to use. In the case of the Pretoria version, many of the students took it upon themselves to source new visual material that would support the new sections of text that we had worked into the script, around the death of Osama bin Laden, the Arab Spring, and the fall of Gaddafi.

In trying to sum up the importance of the visual score of the production, we have observed that

The photographs are a critical structural and formal aspect of the work: they serve as a documentary and visual record of historical fact, but also as a keystone for the emotional content, because they are of people, real people and real places, difficult to ignore and difficult to forget. The absolute realism of photography, especially the kind of graphic images that we utilised, offers a powerful tool in theatrical devising. The still image of the photograph set against the moving image of the stage creates a counterpoint, the key being not to reproduce them, but to connect to the emotional impact of the image, and find a way to express that through action. (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010b, p. 141)

Thus, the visuals that we chose served as a powerful stylistic device in the construction of the work.

#### 4. *Musical Choices*

In the same way, music formed a vital part of the production, providing both an accompaniment to, and a commentary on, the action. We drew musical inspiration from a very wide cross-section of sources:

A wide range of musical genres were covered, including acid jazz, rock, punk, folk, and traditional songs. In addition, some original pieces were created for the production, ... Much of the music is performed live, while a recorded soundtrack is also integrated into the action. (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010a, p. 181)

Some of the songs included such different pieces of music as Bob Dylan's *Masters of War*, Eric Bogle's *And the Band Played Waltzing Matilda*, Jimi Hendrix's *Star Spangled Banner*, Billy Joel's *Goodnight Saigon*, U2's *Bullet the Blue Sky*, Joan Baez's *China*, Bright Blue's *Weeping*, Jennifer Ferguson's *Letters to Dickie*, Laurika Rauch's *Hot Gates*, and Green Day's *American Idiot*. In addition to these, we also used such well-known traditional songs as *It's a Long Way to Tipperary*, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, *Senzeni Na?*, *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrica*, *Yerushalayim Shel Zahav*, *The Holy City*, *When Johnnie Comes Marching Home Again*, and *Silent Night*. Tamar's sister, Justine Hess, also composed an original song for the production, entitled *When Boys Go to War*. In each version of the piece, we had at least one cast member who could play the guitar<sup>46</sup>, and so these students were also able to compose short pieces of music that were used to underpin and accompany much of the danced action.

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<sup>46</sup> The first and second versions of the production also included a student who played the cello onstage.

Many of the UKZN students were also studying Music, and so were able to use their expertise to orchestrate and create harmonies for many of the pieces of music.



*Figure 22. One of my favourite photographs from the production, showing [from L to R] Silindile Hlengwa, Julia Wilson, Devin Moller, Immaculate Lihle Cele, Christopher Tobo and Kirsten Holder singing Joan Baez's 'China'. The students had worked on this song largely on their own, working out the harmonies and reinterpreting the song to suit their voices. Photograph by Val Adamson.*

I cannot over-emphasise how important this musical score was in the production. Music was instrumental in setting both the mood and the tone for the various parts of the text, and served also as a structuring device; we used music to transition from one moment to the next, and used changes in musical style to signal shifts in energy and mood. Music also allowed us to vary the emotional tone from one moment to the next; the variety of different musical styles ensured that we were able to sound many different 'notes', rather than having the work become monotone and one-dimensional. We also used music as an impetus for many of the important improvised movement sequences;

The chapter entitled 'Training' is constructed almost entirely in relation to the song *I Feel Like I'm Fixin' To Die Rag* (Country Joe and the Fish 1967). This song, written with direct reference to the Vietnam conflict, offers a most intriguing source for constructing dramatic action. While its lyrics are hard-hitting and incisive, they are also ironic, and the melody is up-tempo and lively. The result is an almost cabaret-esque musical motif which, when combined with a very dynamic and satiric dance routine, provides an element of comic irony very different from other aspects of the work. (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010b, p. 134)

Because of the nature of the musical accompaniment, we were able to create a moment of humour that parodies the seriousness of military training through the use of the can-can dance.



*Figure 23. The 'Training' sequence in Durban. Photographs by Val Adamson*





*Figure 24. The 'Training' sequence in Pretoria. Photographs by Christina Reinecke.*

## 5. Performative Choices

The other very important stylistic choice was in terms of the performance style; we wanted to engage “a performance aesthetic based strongly on a somatic practice” (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010b, p. 129), as this was the type of performance that suited our cast; they were young, energetic, and all had training in both dance and physical theatre. One of our key aims within the production was to be able to explore and showcase the full range of our students’ talents as actors, singers, dancers, comics, writers, composers, poets, and musicians. The difficulty with casting the piece was that we didn’t really know what it was that we were going to do when we started, as I explained to Devaksha and Lauren:

*... you look back at it and sometimes I think, why did we make the casting decisions we made, but you know, you can’t go back to it, and you kind of go on an impression in the moment, and because we didn’t really know what it was that we were going to do exactly, it was quite difficult to cast it because, we just had to cast people who we thought were going to be creative and innovative, and be able to bring something to the process.*

Thus, we had made a conscious choice to cast a group of people who demonstrated a willingness to try new things, and to step outside of their physical, emotional, and mental comfort zone.

In general, we chose to honour the integrity of the texts by having them spoken as monologues, mostly by single voices; “since they [the texts] belonged to individuals and were the product of individual experiences, it seemed apt to engage the monologic model in the dramatic enactment of these pieces” (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010b, pp. 131-132). In so doing, however, we were asking the actors to walk a very fine line; Brandon and Kamini in particular talked at length about this stylistic challenge:

*BRANDON: I think it’s such a different style, because you can’t do a realist acting style, because you don’t know what they went through and nor will you ever know what they went through. So you’ve got to try and find the balance between*



*doing justice to them, but at the same time, not doing it realistically.*

TANYA: *Okay, what do you mean? Was it difficult to say that stuff every night?*

KAMINI: *Because you still had to make it a performance, so, when you're reading it, you know it's real, but then you have to go through the process of making it a script and making it a performance. It can't just be said, otherwise it won't reach the audience.*

BRANDON: *Also, in some cases, trying to deal with all that content, you almost have to distance yourself from it, because if you have to do it every night, it can be quite psychologically taxing on you as a performer. ... It can't be realist and it can only, it can't come from a realist place. Because nobody can experience what those people went through. It's a different time zone, different experiences, different politics of the world.*

TANYA: *That you have to speak it as a truth, but it can't be your truth?*

KAMINI: *Yeah ...*

BRANDON: *Absolutely! You got to still have that distance to it as well.*

TAMAR: *Mmm ... an aesthetic distance ...*

BRANDON: *Yes ...*

This sense of distance between the narrator and the role is important; we rejected the notion that the cast would try, through mimesis, to portray a single coherent character throughout the work. Rather, each cast member was required to embody multiple 'characters' and voice multiple points of view, as they moved through the various sections of the performance;

Our mode of performance involved the conscious foregrounding of the construction of perspective by interchangeable role-play (the race and gender of the performer did not always have to respond to the race and gender of the role, and performers took on many different roles during the course of the theatrical performance) through embodiment and envoicement of multiple perspectives in order to foreground the idea of a common humanity. (Coetzee, Meskin, & Van der Walt, 2014, p. 95)

In addition to this mode of delivery, where the actor was both 'one' and 'many' at the same time, the students were also expected to engage multiple modes of performance simultaneously. It was very rare that the monologues were not accompanied by some physicalised action, such as dance, mime, tableaux, image, or a combination of all of these. This was extremely difficult, and required that our cast were versatile, committed, and had huge stamina! The monologue sections were also interspersed by sections of pure physical theatre and dance, where little to no text was used.





*Figure 25. A selection of images depicting the physicalised performance style of the piece. Photographs by Val Adamson.*

Many of these physical theatre and dance pieces were constructed through improvisation with the cast as a whole, or with small groups of performers. In some cases, we tasked specific performers who were particularly strong performers, to go away and choreograph specific dance or movement pieces. One example of this is the performance of the following letter:

Sydney 1992

My dearest Charlie,

It's a long time since I've written to you. I didn't think you would get any messages. Now I am not so sure.

You see, I've been going over the past. ... I've been dwelling on the short but rich time we had together. The good times were wonderful, weren't they? It all seemed like yesterday and you were so vividly present. ...

I think I have learned a lot my darling. ... One thing doesn't frighten me any more. It is Time. Time doesn't exist. ... Our marriage was a lifetime. ... It is forty odd years since I saw you, but they seem to have disappeared.

I am not young any more, Charlie. I have wrinkles and grey hair. That youthful beauty you told me to preserve has gone. I still have a fair bit of energy, though. I've needed it when I have been minding those grandchildren of yours. ... I feel content, and, yes, I feel rich, even though I've never filled the gap you left. It wasn't an empty gap. I've always had your love to sustain me.

What I look forward to is seeing our two grandsons grow into manhood. ... In all those hundreds of letters I wrote to you, I always told you how much I loved you. I probably didn't tell you: You are the finest human being I have ever known.

Please be at peace and remember that I've always loved you.

Your loving wife

Olwyn (Carroll, 2006, pp. 376-378)

While the text was spoken by a single actress, we tasked two other female dancers with creating a simple duet to accompany the text. They then worked with our guitar-player, who created a simple and evocative refrain that accompanied their gentle and lyrical movement piece. The movement patterns did not in any way reflect the actual content of the letter, but rather served to echo the melancholy and grief of that particular piece of text.



*Figure 26. Julia Wilson, Silidile Hlengwa and Mandisa Tshiqi perform the letter to Charlie. Photographs by Val Adamson.*

What evolved therefore was a style of performance that is hard to adequately describe. As we have observed,

Central to the stylistic choices was the desire to engage multiple modes of representation ranging from direct audience address, spoken word performance, hip-hop music, slam poetry, dance (both contemporary, traditional, and classical), choral verse, interactive dialogue, and tableaux. The performance style is thus enormously difficult to define in a singular way: we consider the piece to blend image theatre and physical theatre forms in its attempt to generate a unique visual, auditory and sensory experience in a kind of total theatre which communicates in multiple modes simultaneously. (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010a, p. 184)

This multiplicity of modes, coupled with the huge range of sources for the material, allowed us to create a collage-like, “complex, multi-layered, multi-vocal, and multi-visions” (Heddon & Milling, 2006, p. 218) experience, which engaged the audience on multiple levels at all times.

### *Directorial process and decision-making*

As with all devised theatre, the primary mode of creating the performance of *FrontLines* was improvisation. However, because the spoken text consisted largely of found material, we did not use a completely free improvisation technique. Instead, we made use of what we have called “guided workshopping” (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010a, p. 180) as we led the students through specific exercises and improvisation tasks, using our source material, including text, photographs and music, as inspiration and impetus, especially in helping to find ways to activate the words on the page and bring them to life. This guided workshopping and improvisation began before Tamar and I had any clear idea of what the production would look like, or even how we would structure the material. Many of the stylistic and structuring choices I have discussed above were only made once we were already rehearsing. Thus, while Tamar and I had been almost solely responsible for collecting the bulk of the material, it was only when we began to work with the students in the rehearsal room, that the shape and texture of the production began to emerge.

It is hard to accurately describe the actual making of the performance; the alchemy of the creative process within the rehearsal room defies logic and, in many ways, memory. In *Creative Collaboration*, Vera John-Steiner borrows the phrase ‘the zone of magic’ from one of her interviewees (2000, p. 191). To me, this is what the rehearsals for *FrontLines* have always felt like; there was such a powerful sense of creative magic at work, that I have never quite been able to find in other production processes. Something special was created in the combination of the material, the cast, the technicians, and Tamar and I (as well as Marié-Heleen in Pretoria). I also think that the speed with which we have had to rehearse each version has created something of a ‘pressure-cooker’ environment, in which each person is working at the height of their creative powers. This rapid pace of innovation, in the small space of time that we had, also makes it hard to remember every moment and every creative leap; sometimes, so many different things were happening at the same time that it was quite bewildering. Thus, it is impossible to provide a complete description of the creative process. Rather, I am able to provide some insights into specific examples of tasks and methods that we used, and some of the creative leaps that were made as a result of these.

Our improvisation process began before Tamar and I even departed on our trip to Europe, and even though we were still furiously gathering material for the piece. Because we had already held auditions, we were able to leave our cast with a set of tasks to complete while we were away, and while they were on their Winter Recess<sup>47</sup>. We left them with a copy of the lyrics to Laurika Rauch’s song *Hot Gates*, which consist almost entirely of a list of the names of places and battles, and asked them to research as many of these as they could. We also asked the students to read a series of poems and respond to these creatively, and provided them with some writing prompts from which they were asked to write letters and poems. Much of this early material was not actually included in the final

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<sup>47</sup> During July, both DUT and UKZN close for approximately 3-4 weeks each year.

product, but it was helpful for us in that it allowed the students to begin to engage with the topics and ideas we were going to be working with. Tamar and I talked about the importance of this preparation work in my interview with her:

*TAMAR: The other thing that I think was really interesting, as a methodological idea was the fact that we had to start and then go [to Europe]. Because remember we gave them that homework, because we were leaving, and I've often thought about that and I think it was such a good thing because it made them sit with it. It made them sit with a consciousness. They had to think about it, before they were doing it. And I actually think that that was a really, really Important thing that happened, because by the time we came to the rehearsal room, they'd already been sitting with something and they had already kind of developed an awareness of stuff.*

*TANYA: Some of them did more than others.*

*TAMAR: They had **Hot Gates** and they had to research, I think they were told they had to find five things, and then they had the map of the world, my map of the world, and they had to write a letter. There were like five tasks that they had to do. But even if the tasks weren't good, the fact of having to engage it and the fact of having to come prepared... I think was such an important thing and I've often thought about it because when you get students who come into a room and they, sometimes they haven't even bothered to read the script, they don't know anything about it, they come in totally unprepared for anything, and the fact that we had said to them it's going to be a big project, we're going away, when we come back we've got three weeks, you have to be ready to work. They were, in a way, almost amped up for it.*

After our return from Europe, and at the beginning of the new teaching term, we began to work with the students in the rehearsal room: at first we each worked with our own students, on our respective campuses. We worked largely with simple improvisation tasks, and gave them little to no text to work with. Rather, we began by working with images and ideas, and in some cases with music, as impetus for the experimentation. After about a



week, we gathered all the students together in one rehearsal room, and they were able to show each other what they had done. These early rehearsals bore much fruit; while working only with the DUT students, I brought Country Joe and The Fish's *I Feel Like I'm Fixin' to Die Rag* to the rehearsal one day, and set the students to work on creating a movement sequence that would accompany the music in performance. In the space of about two hours, the DUT students had roughed out the shape of the movement piece that would be used in the final performance as part of the 'Training' section of the work. In the DUT contingent, we also had a few very talented male dancers, and Tamar came to my offices one afternoon to work with them on an idea she had, based on the photograph of prisoners at the infamous Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq. Using the photographs themselves as inspiration, these three students created a series of moving tableaux which were all included in the final product<sup>48</sup>.

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<sup>48</sup> This process is discussed in detail in Meskin & Van der Walt (2010b).



*Figure 27: Sifiso Ndlovu, Nhlakanipho Manqele, and Menzi Mkhwane performing the 'Abu Ghraib' sequence. Photographs by Val Adamson.*

Once we brought all the students from both Universities together, we had to start the work from a slightly different perspective. We knew that there would be some resistance from both sets of students to working together. One of the reasons Tamar and I had decided to use students from both our institutions was that we wanted to build bridges between two groups of students, but at first, these two groups were enormously distrustful of each other. There was a certain degree of 'us and them' thinking, and quite a bit of grandstanding by each group, as they struggled to get used to each other. Almost all the cast members I spoke to talked about this early tension:

*TANYA: How did you feel about the sort of the DUT/UKZN divide? I mean in the beginning the two groups of students didn't know each other.*

*NHLAKANIPHO: I'm always interested in meeting new people, but having studied at DUT and having known people from UKZN before we worked together, there's always been a competition. And there's always been some sort of competing when it comes to the different types of learning. UKZN is seen as something that's more textual and more theory based, DUT is seen as something that is more technical or more physical and practical, and we started seeing things that we appreciated, as DUT students, that UKZN people got to learn, and UKZN people got to see us. So we complemented each other in the things that we did, and because we started working together, and got rid of the whole: "I'm competing with you because you're from UKZN," we got to learn more from each other than different ways of learning.*

.....

*LAUREN: The most difficult part was probably towards the beginning, getting to know the strengths and weaknesses of the group as a whole, because obviously from the two institutions, there was a strength from theory from UKZN and a very, very strong pull towards practical at DUT, and it was something that astounded probably everyone from UKZN, because we'd never really delved that deep into practical and it was very nerve wracking at first, because you're like, are we are going to have to do this, because we probably couldn't. So that was probably the most difficult thing, but as we started to learn from each other, it got easier and easier.*

.....

*KAMINI: And a value to appreciate that others can teach you things, you know? Because from the very beginning, we were all, before DUT got there, we had such an opinion about ourselves as UKZN, and when they got there, we were like whoa! I remember Menzi did that one piece where he got picked up, and we'd never seen or done that before and we were like, wow ... you know?*

At this stage, instead of thinking about the performance itself, Tamar and I focussed primarily on breaking down the barriers between students and creating a sense of ensemble. However, without the luxury of lots of time, we had to work fast, as we discussed in our interview:

*TAMAR: And it was interesting because actually, when I think about that rehearsal room, we didn't actually do very much deliberate ensemble building. We didn't have time.*

*TANYA: We did some ice breaking and things like that.*

*TAMAR: There was that. We did the name game and I think we did two or three exercises, and then went straight into the thing with the posters and the '**Pack up your Troubles**' song, and it was instant.*

*TANYA: But you see, in a way having those creative tasks.... they did the same job. They made them get to know each other very quickly and they made them get to see who had ideas, who had stuff to bring to it, and who didn't.*

*TAMAR: And I think they also learned who to trust, which was a very big part of it.*

*TANYA: Very very quickly.*

In placing these two very different groups of students together, we had taken all of them very firmly out of their comfort zone, and it took a few days for them to find ways to work together. One advantage of this was that both groups were very eager to prove themselves, and so a healthy rivalry developed where students eagerly worked as hard as they could for us, in order to show off their skills and talents.

When we later took the production to Pretoria, we had a very similar situation, as Kamini and Brandon observed:

*KAMINI: I think it was, in the beginning, because we were working with new people, there was a sort of distance and then once we got to know each other there was a better way of working or collaboration, because we had different ways of doing things ...especially Pretoria.*

*BRANDON: Ja, that was different.*

*KAMINI: ... That was very different. They weren't used to making their own sets and things and staying late and stuff like that. But I think, once they, they got used to us, it became a bit better.*

Because of the logistical obstacles implicit in taking students from Durban to Pretoria during term-time, we had very little time with the whole cast together in Pretoria, and so we had a very short time to create a cohesive group out of two very different groups of students, taking them

...from an initial sense of distrust, through real fear at the pressure of the process, towards a greater sense of ensemble, and eventually into the finished work.... Early rehearsal sessions were thus mainly about trying to break down distrust and anxiety and the sense of students competing and having to prove themselves in some way. For us it was trying to establish a sense of ensemble and creating a space in which students could share an artistic and educational journey. This was done through trust-games, collective breathing exercises, and exercises foregrounding emotional, vocal and physical attuning. (Coetzee, Meskin, & Van der Walt, 2014, p. 83)



*Figure 28: Students in Pretoria, working on songs together. Photograph from my private collection.*



*Figure 29: Working on dance sequences. Photograph from my private collection.*



*Figure 30: Tamar working with students on dance sequences. Photograph from my private collection.*



*Figure 31: Physical warm-ups before rehearsal. Photograph from my private collection.*





*Figure 32: Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I (R to L) giving notes at the end of rehearsal.  
Photograph from my private collection.*

It should also be kept in mind that the cast in every version of the work has been made up of a cross-section of students from different races, language groups, and socio-economic backgrounds, who have had to find their way to common ground through the process of rehearsal and improvisation. However, in every version, while we have been cognisant of helping students to settle in with each other, we have also found that the best and quickest way to do this is to work together on creating the performance; once the students begin to work creatively, the awareness of the differences between them seems to lessen. Nhlakanipho and I discussed this:

*TANYA: And how did you feel about that putting everybody together in a room, and just expecting you guys to get on, and get on with it.*

*NHLKANIPHO: Which was pretty much the line that you guys used all the time, “Get on and get on with it.”*

*TANYA: Exactly.*

*NHLKANIPHO: Get along and get on with it, I heard that a lot.*



In encouraging students to “get on with it”, we try to avoid them having time to think about their differences; rather, by throwing them all into the proverbial ‘deep end’, and by immediately asking them to work creatively together, we short-circuit the process of getting to know each other.

We had a number of different ways of approaching the creative work of making the performance:

The actual creative process varied enormously depending on the sections of the performance text being generated. In some instances, the students were asked to bring prepared responses to rehearsal which were then utilised as a starting point for the creative process. Another methodology asked the performers to create sections with each other working in small groups in the rehearsal room from particular stimuli. Some students were given specific assignments – writing text, composing music, choreographing movements – which were then brought into the finished performance text. Some sections were more traditionally directed/ choreographed, although even here input was requested from the performers involved. (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010b, p. 133)

Tamar and I have, over the years we have worked together, developed a particular style of directing, and this manifested in the *FrontLines* process. We seldom, if ever, tell an actor how to say a line, or perform a move. When we talked about our process, we both agreed that this is important to us:

*TANYA: You and I are not people who tell them, you know, like [anonymous student<sup>49</sup>] said, just tell us what you want us to do.*

*TAMAR: Yes, exactly.*

*TANYA: And you and I both said no.*

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<sup>49</sup> Because this student was not an active participant in this study, I have chosen not to reveal their identity.

TAMAR: *We don't do that.*

TANYA: *We don't do that. It's not how we work. We don't work in a way where we just give you the answer.*

Rather, we try to help the actor find the meaning of the line, through asking many questions that prompt the actor to think for themselves of ways in which to approach a line. The only exception to this is when we will correct the pronunciation of specific words, not to obliterate the actor's own accent, but to aid them in conveying the meaning of the word correctly. Similarly, I will often try to help students to correct the stress and intonation patterns in their lines, as this allows them to better communicate their meaning and subtext to the audience. Thus, our directing style, while very hands on, works through guiding the actor to their own discoveries. Part of this approach is also what we call 'directing through absence'; we often leave actors alone for up to twenty or thirty minutes at a time to work on their own in creating a moment of performance. We use the excuse that 'we just want to go and have some tea', and leave the room, allowing the actors (usually students) to work together without our input. Tamar and I remembered one example of this, during our discussion:

TANYA: *And I always think of [the song] **Keep The Home Fires Burning**.*

TAMAR: *Yes.*

TANYA: *And what they did with that piece. I mean we literally, we gave them the song, we sang the song and we went out of the room and I mean they made something very beautiful.*

TAMAR: *Absolutely.*

TANYA: *They made a beautiful moment and that is, I mean we'd thought of the song, but they really took it and did something with it.*



*Figure 33: 'Keep The Home Fires Burning' in performance. Photograph by Val Adamson.*

This was a methodology we used often on the *FrontLines* Project; stepping out of the room changed the dynamic and allowed the students free reign to experiment, and also allowed us to spend that valuable time in discussions about what to do next, or in working on the many other tasks we had to deal with in the run up to the performances. Nhlakanipho talked about this aspect of the work:

*TANYA: Tell me something, Tamar and I have been talking about this, and this idea that we often do is we would say to you guys, “Do this, we’re going to make tea,” and we would leave you. Do you think that works, I mean do you think that’s constructive, us not being in the room?*

*NHLAKANIPHO: At first I felt it didn’t, because the first time you did it, we just saw it as a break ourselves. Where you told us to “Do this, we’re going to make tea”, we were like: “Yes, we’re free, right, what did you do this weekend,” and then when you came back, you became more strict, saying, “I can’t believe you guys haven’t done this, do it now, we’re leaving again”. First of all, I was very sceptical about it, “Okay you left, we didn’t do anything, yet you are leaving us again, what makes you think that we’re going to do something now,” but we did and it allowed even people who were perceived as shy to no longer be shy. So I*

*was like, this allows us to be a part of the piece ourselves, and it's not just Tanya wanting us to do what she would like to do, but she's not us so she makes us do it.*

*TANYA: I mean that's certainly our perception of it, is that if we absent ourselves... by stepping out we are no longer there to be the ones who know, we are no longer there to be the ones with the answers.*

*NHLAKANIPHO: We have to find our own answers, yeah.*

*TANYA: Do you think that's what happened, or do you think that people just go "oh my God, I don't know?"*

*NHLAKANIPHO: I think, I think you were brave enough to give it time, and so eventually with time it became that. As opposed to just doing it once and realising it's not working and saying: "Okay fine we are going to be here all the time." You gave it time, so it ended up being that, and we were able to find answers ourselves.*

Thus, when we returned to the rehearsal room, we could begin to work with and shape the students' ideas, and incorporate them into the production as a whole. Large sections of *FrontLines* were created in this manner; by getting out of the way, we allowed the students to become active creators in their own right.

As I have already said, the creative energy of the rehearsal space was quite extraordinary; we began with vast amounts of material (the students were astonished when we came into the rehearsal room, not with a script, but with huge piles of paper from which we would work), and no clear vision of what the performance would look like. All of the 'making' of the work happened organically in the rehearsal space, in a very short time period:

The rehearsal process was intense: working with the cast of 47 for a very tight period of three weeks was deeply challenging, both for us and for them. Negotiating effectively the mix of text, dance, music and images necessitated a detailed and complex period of experimentation and development, editing and re-editing the vast amount of material that we had to hand. Additionally, the

performers had to learn to negotiate multiple performance models. (Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010a, p. 181)

When we went to Pretoria, this time frame was compressed even more. While we worked with the students in Durban, and Marié-Heleen worked with her students in Pretoria for a period of about two weeks, we only had 9 days with the whole cast in Pretoria before the production opened!

It is impossible here for me to detail exactly how each of the students contributed to the final product. The performed work is a quilt made up not only of different pieces of source text, photographs, and songs, but also of a myriad of performative moments that were created by the students that were part of the process. While Tamar and I are credited as Directors and Devisers of the work, we freely acknowledge that the piece also belongs equally to all the students who have been a part of the project.

### *From Performance to Research*

As I have already stated, *FrontLines* is, in many ways, the most important production I have ever worked on. This is partly because of my personal sense of connection to the piece, but also because it has become the centre of my research work ever since. In many ways, the *FrontLines* Project seemed to be the culmination point of many of my personal interests; my fascination with stories of war, my interest in war photography and the recording of the experience of war, my personal political stance which is against any form of military aggression, and my love for folk and protest music. All of these became a part of the *FrontLines* quilt. In the aftermath of the project, it was my own reflections on the process, and my lengthy discussions with Tamar and Marié-Heleen, that led me to this thesis. While writing and publishing several papers about the production, we retrospectively worked to understand both what we had made in the *FrontLines* Project, and how we had made it. In considering my own work on the project, I began to think about the ways in which Tamar

and I work together, and how we have built a type of synergy between us. I also thought about the different sets of 'knowings' that Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I have each brought to the process, and this led me to begin to question my own place and role as a collaborator; how do my collaborators see my role in the process? What do they think I bring to the process? Who am I when I am making a piece of theatre like this? This wondering led me also to thinking about the effect that *FrontLines* had on the students who were a part of it; it was immediately obvious that the students had made friendships and created bonds that had nothing to do with us, their teachers. It was also clear that for many of the students, there was a deep sense of connection to the work that we had made together. I felt instinctively that both the students and I had learnt an enormous amount. However, what was not immediately obvious to me was how one could understand and explain what and how we had learnt. The next two sections of this thesis will go on to consider each of these two important aspects of the *FrontLines* Project.

## *Section 2: WHO AM I AS A COLLABORATIVE THEATRE-MAKER?*

Having grappled with my collaborative theatre-making practice, and its particular embodiment in the *FrontLines* Project, my study now moves on to examine and understand in greater detail the nuanced workings of my collaboration(s). Thus, this section of the thesis seeks to answer the second of my critical questions:

- Who am I as a collaborative theatre-maker?

To answer this question, this section of the work firstly undertakes an in-depth discussion of the concept of collaboration in Chapter 5, and then goes on to elucidate the specific characteristics of creative collaboration in Chapter 6. The characteristics of both collaboration and creative collaboration that I have identified in these two chapters will then be used to examine and understand my own collaborative practice in Chapter 7 and 8.

In order to try to find out who I am in my collaborative practice, I have drawn on:

- data generated through my interviews with both of my collaborators, Marié-Heleen and Tamar;
- data generated through my interviews with students who were involved in the *FrontLines* Project;
- my own Reciprocal Self Interview (RSI).

In analysing these data sources, I worked at first instinctively and organically, in a process of open coding (Given, 2008, pp. 581-2), simply trying to find the meanings constructed within my dialogue with the participants. Once I had noted this first level of analysis in the text, I then went back to the characteristics that my theoretical understandings had revealed. I looked at the data again with these in mind, and used a process of axial coding (Given, 2008, pp. 51-2) to find where and how these categories could be applied to the understandings I had already generated, to narrow and deepen my interpretation of the data. This allowed

me to 'crystallize' (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) my understanding of my self-in-action as a collaborator.



## Chapter 5

*“Who are the ‘we’ in all of this?”*

(Murray, 2016, p. 37)

*“...collaboration is a strictly immanent, wild and illegitimate praxis.”  
(Schneider, 2006, p. 575)*

In order to answer the question “Who am I as a collaborator?”, I must first gain an understanding of myself as a collaborator, and how and why I collaborate in the way that I do. To do this, it is important first to establish exactly what I mean by the concept or idea of collaboration. I think that for most people, the meaning of the word collaboration is fairly clear; it means to work together with someone or something else, towards a goal of some kind. Robert Cohen points out that “the word is a compound of ‘co’ and ‘labor’ – thus indicating ‘shared work’” (2011, p. 11), and as Simon Murray, in his consideration of the ‘principle and practice’ (2016, p. 27) of collaboration, says “At its most obvious and fundamental, ‘collaboration’ means working with one or more people to undertake a task and achieve shared goals” (2016, p. 29). In and of itself, this seems like a good thing, and it is my feeling that in contemporary culture, it is largely regarded in a positive light. In fact, in the contemporary world, the notion of collaboration pervades almost every aspect of our lives: from hip-hop artists who collaborate on songs, to celebrity chefs who collaborate with supermarket chains to produce a range of goods, from crowd-funding for a whole range of innovative projects, to crowd-sourcing for software and product development by teams of people who communicate only via the Internet (Tharp, 2009, p. 8; Schneider, 2007, p. 1), we seem to be surrounded by examples of collaboration in action. As Twyla Tharp observes, “Collaboration is the buzzword of the new millennium” (2009, p. 7). While theorists like David Henry Feldman have termed the 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘the century of the individual’ (in John-Steiner, 2000, p.viii), there seems to be a recognition that the 21<sup>st</sup> century has brought to

an end this era of the individual as the driver of innovation and productivity (Tharp, 2009; John-Steiner, 2000; Ruhsam, 2016; Schneider, 2006 & 2007), and instead has propelled us into the realm of the collaborative. Simon Murray rightly observes that, “As rhetoric, aspiration, organizing strategy, political structure and relational principle collaboration has become ubiquitous over the last decade”, and wisely goes on to ask “Of what does this proliferation speak, and what wider story does it tell?” (2016, p. 27).

This is a telling question, and one which this chapter seeks to answer in some manner. While Murray’s simple definition works on a macro level, the nature of my study demands a far more nuanced and finely-wrought understanding of collaboration. I need to be able to answer Murray’s question, at least in part, in order to understand who I am as a collaborator. Thus, it is necessary to delve far deeper into the meanings of the word, to understand the many ways in which collaboration can be both a principle and a practice (Murray, 2016) for mutual meaning-making.

Despite the very large body of work around the notion of collaboration, there seems to be no clear consensus that would provide a general theory of collaboration. Instead, the researcher is faced with a proliferation of theories of collaboration from fields as varied as sociology, psychology, anthropology, economics, business studies, and computer science, among others, as well a number of wiki sites on the Internet (such as [www.collaboration.wikia.com](http://www.collaboration.wikia.com)), devoted to ongoing discussions between scholars from different disciplines. It is therefore impossible to find a ‘one-size-fits-all’ theoretical framework for a discussion of my own collaborative practice. Instead, I have surveyed a wide range of sources, which have allowed me to draw up a broad concept of what collaboration means, and which will help me to explore my own practice in greater depth.

Merriam-Webster provides a definition of the word that serves as a good place to start. According to the dictionary, *collaborate* is an intransitive verb, meaning:

**1** : to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor - An international team of scientists *collaborated* on the study.

**2** : to cooperate with or willingly assist an enemy of one's country and especially an occupying force - suspected of *collaborating* with the enemy

**3** : to cooperate with an agency or instrumentality with which one is not immediately connected - The two schools *collaborate* on library services.

(Collaborate. (n.d.). Retrieved March 28, 2017, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collaborate>)

The definition thus confirms the generally held understanding of what it means to collaborate – it is to work together, to co-operate, with others. However, there is also a darker, more negative aspect to this definition, which I shall examine in greater detail a little later in the chapter. Another ‘working definition’ of collaboration is provided by the Wilder Research Centre:

**Collaboration** is a mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations to achieve common goals.

The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals; a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility; mutual authority and accountability for success; and a sharing of resources and rewards. (Mattessich, Murray-Close, & Monsey, 2001)

Of course, where they use the word ‘organisations’, I would also use ‘people’ or ‘individuals’ as it is clear that collaboration does not only occur between organisations. What is of interest to me here is the idea of collaboration as being ‘mutually beneficial’ and ‘well-defined’, two ideas that I will return to in greater detail as I examine my own collaborative practice.

Twyla Tharp, in her fascinating account of her own collaborative choreographic practice, *The Collaborative Habit*, also begins with a fairly simple definition, but one that adds further depth to our understanding of the term,

I define collaboration as people working together- sometimes by choice, sometimes not. Sometimes we collaborate to jump-start creativity; other times the focus is simply on getting things done. In each case, people in a good collaboration accomplish more than the group's most talented members could achieve on their own. (2009, p. 4)

This allows us to add a number of insights to our broad concept of collaboration. The first is that she alludes to the fact that while collaboration is often a voluntary act, one that we chose to enter into, in many cases we are also forced to collaborate with others, in ways and in relationships that are not always comfortable, or of our own choosing. Her definition also allows us to understand that while collaboration is often creative in nature, it can also be purely utilitarian, in that it helps us to 'get things done'.

These definitions offer a very broad basis for an understanding of the nature of collaboration. However, a deeper reading and consideration of the wide range of source texts provides a vast number of insights, which I have organised into the following '*artefact of thinking*<sup>50</sup>':

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<sup>50</sup> See 'A Methodological Parenthesis'.



‘betweenness’ of collaboration ... which is crucial to mark in this respect. (2016, p. 36)

I like this idea of a force field – to me it implies both the seductive power of the collaborative relationship, as well as the sense in which the collaborative relationship may be immune to or protected from outside forces, by virtue of its relationality. The idea of ‘betweenness’ also works to suggest the ways in which acts of collaboration take place in the intersectional spaces between the individual subjectivities of the people who work together.

This sense of the intersectional ‘betweenness’ of collaborative work relates too to the notion of mutuality in collaboration. Vera John-Steiner calls this the “*dynamics of mutuality, which are not restricted to artists and scientists, but are relevant to people in every walk of life* [her emphasis]” (2000, p. 3). As Martina Ruhsam observes, “Productive collaboration practices recognize mutual dependencies as unavoidable and positive” (2016, p. 88). This sense of mutual dependence on the collaborative partner/s is at the core of the collaborative relationship, and while this can be a weakness if the mutual dependency becomes destructive, it can also constitute one of the greatest strengths of the collaborative partnership. In Murray’s opinion, we can see collaborative relationships as “...sites of mutuality, transformation, exchange, and of a radical reclaiming of the experience of being ‘in common’” (2016, p. 35).

However, it is also important to remember that collaborators also have to guard against this mutuality, in order to maintain their individual differences. Bojana Kunst points to this aspect of the collaborative relationship

...the interesting notion of the process of *sharing* can also be interpreted as a specific understanding of collaboration as an exchange of differences, creations and innovations, and no longer as a hierarchical division of tasks. (2010, p. 25)

Therefore, collaboration must engage with a plurality of voices and opinions, in honouring the individual differences of the collaborative partners. As Ruhsam observes “The term ‘collaboration’ would rather be associated with a potential space for the negotiation of individual differences” (2016, p. 81). The preservation of individual voices and opinions within the collaborative partnership is imperative for the health and effectiveness of the collaboration itself:

Collaboration always engages with the politics of interaction and relation - it cannot help but do this - and at the centre of this must lie a refusal to ignore or erase difference, and an ever-present awareness of the dangers of a fictional consensus. (Murray, 2016, p. 44)

This warning against the complacency of assuming a collectively agreed consensus, and the importance of preserving the plurality of voices within the collaborative partnership also informs other aspects of the concept of collaboration, which will be discussed a little later in this chapter.

*2. Collaboration is not always by choice, but it almost always involves a deliberate choice to collaborate.*

As we saw in Twyla Tharp’s definition quoted above, collaboration is often a choice, but it can also be a state of being that is forced upon the participants by forces outside of their own volition. The reality of work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the forces of what Schneider calls “immaterial production” (2007, p. 1), means that people are forced to work alongside and with others in collaborative relationships that are not of their own choosing.

As Tharp goes on to say

You can't force people to collaborate. You can make them share offices and serve on committees together, but if their hearts aren't in it, the process is an empty shell. Personal, emotional commitment is crucial. (2009, p. 12)

This notion is important – as the old saying goes, 'you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink'. While people can be placed into working groups, and expected to 'work together' (Schneider, 2007, p. 1), this does not necessarily mean that they are actually involved in an act of collaboration. True collaboration requires a decision to engage not only in 'working next to' someone else, but instead to engage deeply with the idea of 'working with'. Noyale Colin and Stephanie Sachsenmaier, in discussing the work of Charles Green, point out that "... collaboration entails a deliberate choice ... away from 'individual identity to composite subjectivity' ..." (Green, 2001, p. x, in Colin & Sachsenmaier, 2016, p. 6).

Thus, true collaboration calls for a 'deliberate decision' to embrace a different way of working. This idea of 'composite subjectivity' links to the ideas of intersectional 'betweenness' and mutual dependence discussed above. In embracing these notions, the collaborator is forced to *decide* to collaborate; true collaboration cannot simply happen without this. Tharp goes on to say

Collaborators aren't born, they're made. Or, to be more precise, built, a day at a time, through practice, through attention, through discipline, through passion and commitment – and, most of all, through habit. (2009, p. 12)

What this points to is that the decision to engage in a collaborative relationship is *intentional* in nature.

### *3. Collaboration is intentional*

The word *intentional* implies that something is done *purposively*, and *with intent*. While this links to the idea of a conscious choice to collaborate, as discussed above, it also relates



to the notion that collaboration must have some kind of clearly defined aim/goal/purpose. Tharp notes that “A clearly stated and consciously shared purpose is the foundation of great collaborations” (2009, p. 25). This does not necessarily mean that the participants in a collaborative project necessarily know what the end result will be, but rather that they have similar (but not necessarily exactly the same) ideas about where they want their collaborative efforts to go. Colin and Sachsenmaier describe this intentionality as ‘meta-structural’ (2016, pp. 12-13), and go on to say

Access to the ‘meta-structural’ plane supposes a considerable expertise and an explicit acknowledgement of systems and possible options available to the making ... Further aspects that we might find in operation at this plane of ‘meta-practice’ are a commitment to shared sensibilities and ways of seeing... (2016, p. 13)

In Tharp’s definition quoted earlier in this chapter, she speaks of using collaboration to ‘jump-start creativity’ or simply for ‘getting things done’ (2009, p. 4). In both of these cases, these can be seen to be ‘meta-structural’ intentions – they concern the over-arching goal of the collaborative work, without detailing in any way the manner in which the work will be done, or necessarily describing the finished product.

*4. Collaboration involves shared thinking: a meeting of ideas, and an ‘integration of specialised and creative activities’ (Cohen, 2011).*

In his discussion of collaboration in the theatre, Robert Cohen points out that “Collaborating includes, but is considerably more than, co-laboring and cooperating.” (2011, p. 23). I would argue that what separates true collaboration from ‘co-laboring and cooperating’, among others, is the sense of shared thinking. As Vera John-Steiner observes in her seminal text *Creative Collaboration*,

Generative ideas emerge from joint thinking, from significant conversations, and from sustained, shared struggles to achieve new insights by partners in thought. (2000, p. 3)

This notion, of ‘joint thinking and shared struggles’ is important, as it relates to what Colin and Sachsemaier call “shared sensibilities and ways of seeing” (2016, p. 13). In common parlance, ‘two heads are better than one’ – the sharing of thinking tasks allows for greater creativity and inventiveness, through the dialogic nature of collaborative work. As Rob Roznowski and Kirk Domer note, “Collaboration implies a meshing of ideas to us” (2009, p. 1).

In discussing the ‘dynamics of mutuality’ (as discussed above), John-Steiner goes on to explain that “In collaborative work we learn from each other by teaching what we know; we engage in mutual appropriation” (2000, p. 3). This implies a sharing of expertise in the collaborative relationship. Each participant brings to the collaborative process their own sets of ‘knowings’, and in engaging in shared thinking, places those knowings at the disposal of others in the collaborative relationship. Cohen characterises collaboration as “a complex integration of specialized and creative activities” (2011, p. 23), which to my mind also implies a sharing of thought-processes, knowings, and experiences, in service of the *intention* of the collaborative relationship.

##### *5. The sum of collaboration is greater than its parts*

This is a truism often associated with the collaborative relationship; the result of collaborative thinking or making is ‘more’ than that which would result from the thinking or making of an individual on their own. Henry James argues for the power of this effect of collaboration

The best things come ...from the talents that are members of a group: every man [or woman] works better when he has companions working in the same line, and

yielding to the stimulus of suggestion, comparison, emulation. Great things have been done by solitary workers, but they have usually been done with double the pains they would have cost if they had been produced in more genial circumstances. (1909, p. 31, in Farrell, 2001, p. 1)

James' implication is clear; the work made by those who work in conjunction with others is better than that created by those who chose always to work alone, and can often be done with less 'pains'. While I am not sure that I completely agree with James in all of this, as collaboration is as much, if not more work at times, it certainly seems to be generally agreed that the thinking and doing together that collaborative work entails can lead to results far greater than those which any of the collaborators would have achieved on their own. Vera John-Steiner quotes playwright Tony Kushner, author of *Angels in America*, who says

The fiction that artistic labor happens in isolation, and that artistic accomplishment is exclusively the provenance of individual talents, is politically charged, and in my case at least, repudiated by the facts... Had I written these plays without the participation of my collaborators, they would be entirely different – would in fact never have come to be. (John-Steiner, *Creative Collaboration*, 2000, p. 4)

I would support Kushner's opinion that, without collaborative effort, many types of artistic and creative work would never come to be – the power that lies in the collaborative shared thinking allows greater creativity and problem-solving than would be possible without the collaborative relationship. As Twyla Tharp sagely notes, "....the wisdom of a smart group is greater than the brainpower of its smartest member ..." (2009, p. 8).

## 6. *Collaboration involves risk*

Despite the obvious advantages of the ‘the whole is greater than the sum of its parts’<sup>51</sup>, aspect of collaboration, it is also true that collaborative relationships always include some element of risk; depending on the nature of the relationship, this can be either positive, or negative, or at times both. In a positive sense, the nature of collaboration allows for the risks involved in any enterprise to become ‘a burden shared’, and by implication, ‘a burden halved’. The idea that the burden of taking risks, of stepping outside the conventional way of doing or thinking, can be shared between collaborators, can often allow for greater risk-taking than would have happened if any of the collaborators was working on their own. As Vera John-Steiner observes “...partnerships can support a person’s willingness to take risks in creative endeavors...” (2000, p. 79).

In talking of this sense of sharing the risk, and the increased capacity for risk-taking that it engenders, Murray also points out that collaboration can be seen to be ‘risk-laden’, arguing that,

... ‘risk-laden’ implies lack of certainty about outcomes, a not-knowing about the endgame, an inherent playfulness about process, a relational lightness and a critical generosity between the collaborative players involved. (2016, p. 44)

This notion of generosity is important within our conception of collaboration, as it implies a give-and-take of ideas and support in the process of taking risks and building new connections and ideas.

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<sup>51</sup> Attributed to Aristotle. Aristotle, *Metaphysica* Quotes. (n.d.). Quotes.net. Retrieved June 1, 2017, from <http://www.quotes.net/quote/38481>

However, there is another aspect of risk that is implicit in the collaborative relationship, one which can have negative connotations. In immersing ourselves in a collaborative relationship, the risk always exists that there can be some loss of self that happens in the process of shared thinking and making. As Murray observes

A genuinely radical and utopian collaboration must of necessity, I would argue, possess a willingness to make strange, destabilize and possibly jettison entirely, existing habits, practices and knowledges ... the subversion of the ego and the giving up of dearly-held beliefs and behaviours has always to be a very present possibility. (2016, p. 44)

Thus, collaboration can open the participants up to the risk of having to rethink their own sense of self, and their own 'ways of seeing' (Colin & Sachsenmaier, 2016, p. 13) as part of the process of sharing.

It is therefore possible that collaboration can hold both a positive and a negative relationship with risk, simultaneously; it is possible to take greater risks within the collaborative relationship, but in so doing, one may in fact be opening oneself up to greater risk of loss of some aspect of the self, through the process of collaboration. This is just one of the ways in which collaboration can be two things at once, both negative and positive; a Janus-face.

## *7. Collaboration is immanent, and can be traced from earliest human history*

In his ground-breaking essay, *Collaboration: The Dark Side of the Multitude*, Florian Schneider speaks of collaboration as being "strictly immanent" (2006, p. 575). I have had to really grapple with this idea – at first I could not understand what he meant. The dictionary defines 'immanent' to mean "indwelling or inherent" (Immanent. (n.d.). Retrieved June 1, 2017, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/immanent>). In line with this

definition, I understand Schneider to mean that collaboration is an inbuilt or inherent aspect of human life; that we are instinctively collaborative.

As Twyla Tharp acknowledges, collaboration is nothing new – people have been collaborating since the earliest times,

Collaboration probably started when our ancestors became hunter-gatherers and discovered it wasn't so easy to hunt or gather.... So man figured out how to form tribes and find safety in numbers. (2009, p. 19)

Tharp characterizes collaboration as a “natural instinct” (2009, p. 20), and reminds us that collaboration lies at the root of our sense of community

Time to plant the fields? Everybody pitched in and got it done. Harvesttime? The community raced to get the crops in before that rains came. Where were those crops stored? In barns built by teams of neighbours. (2009, p. 6)

While this may seem somewhat romanticised, especially to those living in urban environments in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Tharp has latched onto something here that feels like a truth – none of us, even in our urbanised, post-modern existence, can manage without engaging and working with others on some level or another. As Murray observes, “...there is hardly any human endeavour which cannot be considered collaborative” (2016, p. 29). Thus, collaboration is a pervasive part of human life, and forms an inherent part of our humanness.

*8. Contemporary models of collaboration have their roots in the social ferment of the 1960s.*

Having said this, however, there are very distinct reasons why collaboration has become “the buzzword of the new millennium” (Tharp, 2009, p. 7). One aspect of the growth of

collaboration as a mode of working, traces its roots back to the social ferment of the 1960s. As a decade, the 1960s mark a moment of rupture in the fabric of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. As Theresa Richardson observes,

In the 1960s and early 1970s, nearly all aspects of the dominant culture were subject to being challenged by members of the demographic surge after WWII known as the Baby Boom. The challenge came in the form of a socio-cultural break with tradition known as the generation gap; the political Civil Rights and Anti-War Movements; and the rise of radical student movements on university campuses and in the streets. ... a transformation from modernism to post-modernism occurred that changed disciplines and worldviews. (2012, p. 3)

As the Baby-Boomers, born in the immediate aftermath of World War II entered their teens and early adulthood, they re-thought and challenged the rather staid and conformist values and ways of life of their parents in the USA; and in Europe and Great Britain, reacted strongly against the deprivations of the post-war period (Miles, 2004, p. 9). Bigsby has called the 1960s “a decade of youth that proclaimed the bankruptcy of old ideas and forms” (2004, p. 240).

This rebellion, or what Richardson calls ‘profanation’ entered into many realms of life, and led to a proliferation of ‘alternate’ ways of being and doing. Many of these, such as the quasi-utopian communes and collectives of the 1960s (including the various communal living arrangements of Haight Ashbury in San Francisco, Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters, Performance groups such as the Living Theatre and the Performance Group, and on a darker note, the Charles Manson Family), as well as the mass collaborative attempts at social and political change engendered by the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-War movement, resulted in an upsurge in collective and collaborative energies and actions. As Martina Ruhsam points out

The artistic collectives of the 1960s and 1970s were bound together by the desire of the participants to emancipate themselves from the rather hierarchical ways of working ... Significant was the common belief in the possibility of a

revolutionary overthrow of prevailing social and political norms and a shared faith in the importance of the role that art played in these revolutionary urges. (2016, p. 83)

This sense of impending revolution, of working towards a radical re-imagining of art, politics, and society at large, was characteristic of what was termed the 'counterculture' of the 1960s.

This sense of both real and impending social change was reflected also in the world of art and theatre. Charles Green notes this tectonic shift in how art (particularly visual art) was made and authored;

I propose that collaboration was a crucial element in the transition from modernist to postmodern art and that a trajectory consisting of a series of artistic collaborations emerges clearly from late 1960s conceptualism onward.... I would argue that artistic collaboration in the late 1960s and during the 1970s occupies a special position: Redefinitions of art and of artistic collaboration intersected at this time. (2001, p. x)

Thus, the collaborative and collective 'moment' of the 1960s serves as a watershed, sharply dividing the modern from the post-modern, in Green's opinion. Certainly I would agree that the 1960s create a radical moment of change that continues to influence the world we live in today in a plethora of ways.

In discussing the artistic work of collaborative groups in the 1960s Alexandra Kolb observes that

Postmodern artists favoured a more egalitarian society ... and experimented with group decision-making, networking, and centreless structures: offering equivalents, in the artistic realm, of the flat hierarchies and inclusive decision-making processes which dominated the agenda of political progressives of this era. (2016, p. 61)



This mirroring of the political spirit of the times in the artistic modes of production was not accidental. The hippies and revolutionaries of the 1960s believed that they were going to change the world, and history has shown us that they did; not necessarily in the ways in which they thought they would change the world, but rather through the introduction of the collaborative energy of their revolution to a wide range of aspects of our lives. Only one example, and one which has radically and irrevocably changed the world, is the advent of computer technology, and the Internet, which first made a connection between two computers on opposite sides of the United States, in 1969.

*9. Collaboration in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is an integral part of neo-liberal management strategies and practices.*

Despite this rather utopian legacy of the 1960s, however, contemporary notions of collaboration have rather more to do with neo-liberal approaches to work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Martina Ruhsam, in her discussion of collaboration in choreographic practice, alerts us to

The shift from collaboration or communal work being a resistant strategy ... from the 1960s onward to that of collaboration being an essential component and requirement for new modes of production in the context of neoliberalism... (2016, p. 83)

As Murray points out, the notion of ‘working together’ (Schneider, 2007), or ‘team work’ “is increasingly proposed as a managerial strategy across all forms of material and immaterial production” (Murray, 2016, p. 28). The proliferation of forms of collaboration across almost every aspect of human endeavour points to the pervasive way in which collaboration has come to be seen as a ‘cure-all’ for the management challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

In 2014 the perfect manager is expected to be able to work in a self-responsible manner, in flexible structures, to communicate and collaborate with various people and teams, to be creative and so on. (Ruhsam, 2016, p. 82)

Schneider (2006, 2007), Kunst (2010) and Murray (2016) all discuss the ways in which collaboration forms part of what they term a 'Post-Fordist' era of production. In this era, the old patterns of top-down management have been replaced by a system where continued collaboration is a fact of everyday life. Murray observes that

This Post-Fordist self-regulating collaboration is driven by bonus targets, rewards, penalties and ever more sophisticated and incorporating forms of productivity management. ... In this global economic landscape of neo-liberal principles and practices, collaboration is a means to further ends: a means to manage time more productively, to enable difficult decisions... to be made more swiftly and with minimal conflict, a means to manage (and justify) labour mobility more smoothly and a strategy to secure employee loyalty to the corporate brand. (2016, pp. 31-32)

However, as these authors also point out, the proliferation of collaboration in management practices also has negative outcomes, as it serves to undermine the power of trade unions (as one example), and commodify originality and creativity. Schneider, in particular, is extremely critical of this proliferation, and warns that

Collaborations are black holes within knowledge regimes. In today's environment, it can be argued that collaboration produces modes of expression that are hollow, ostentatious, offensive. (2006, p. 537)

I'm not sure that I agree with Schneider here, but I can understand his (and others') qualms about the tendency in neo-liberal management parlance, to pay lip-service to the notion of collaboration, while simply using the practice as a new means of control of the worker. To avoid this, anyone who enters into a collaborative relationship needs to engage with what Martina Ruhsam calls "a politics of collaboration" (2016, p. 83).

## *10. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, collaboration is post-consensual and contingent*

Despite its roots in the euphoria of the 1960s, contemporary collaboration has moved away from many of the ideals of the 1960 counterculture; while the communal and collaborative experiments of the 1960s tended to strive towards a sense of commonality and consensus, contemporary collaboration can be seen to be 'post-consensual' (Kolb, 2016, p. 68). As a by-product of the move away from the utopian impulse of the 1960s, Alexandra Kolb reminds us that

...the ethos underpinning many of today's other collaborative projects – especially those which take an explicitly reflective approach and emphasise an element of research – tend to eschew notions of unity and consensual agreement. .... much of the discourse on and practice of, today's 'radical' collaborations emphasise problem-solving and negotiation of individual differences as opposed to seeking consensus. (2016, p. 68)

As we have seen earlier in this chapter, contemporary collaboration allows for a plurality of voices, but does not, as in the 1960s, seek to reconcile those voices into a consensus of common opinion; rather, as Kolb says, contemporary models of collaboration allow for the negotiation of difference, and for the plurality of voices to work together in a space that does not demand absolute agreement on every aspect of the collaborative work performed. Martina Ruhsam observes that

In post-consensual practices of collaboration what is at stake is not the fulfilment of a romantic desire for a providential being together or for a revolutionary overthrow of society. The main concern is rather the enablement of singular processes that are characterized by the polyphony of all, the access to different networks and the development of a common practice. (2016, p. 82)

To me, this notion of a common practice is important here; the plurality of voices enables the development of a common practice, a way of being and doing that brings the collaborators together and enables them to solve problems and work together towards a common aim.

It is this negotiation of the plurality of voices implicit in contemporary collaboration that Ruhsam calls 'a politics of collaboration', as she observes that collaborators today

...are used to the daily negotiations of opinions, roles, modes of communication and rules of co-working that constitute a politics of collaboration. That's how they come into contact with the political dimension of their modes of working day after day in the here and now and have to repeatedly agree anew on the rules of a specific collaborative project. (2016, p. 83)

Thus, the continued negotiation of the plurality of voices and opinions, in the ongoing setting up of the 'rules' for collaborative work, lead us to see acts of collaboration as contingent, in the sense that they are (to use the Merriam Webster definition of the word) "not necessitated: determined by free choice" (Contingent. (n.d.). Retrieved July 4, 2017, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/contingent>). As Alexandra Kolb points out, the space of contemporary collaboration

...constitutes a contingent space in which conflicts, tensions and incompleteness – often previously seen as threats to freedom and stability – are accepted as the core of the democratic project. (2016, pp. 68-69)

Thus, contemporary collaboration, in embracing a politics of difference and post-consensuality, becomes a contingent space in which anything can happen, not in spite of the differences between participants, but rather *because* of these differences. As Ruhsam observes

If one succeeds in avoiding that the constitutive heterogeneity of the participants ... is repudiated or ignored due to a need for consent, then fragile, unprecedented, unconventional and subversive collaborations may take place. In such a scenario of 'between us' forms of knowledge, abilities, affects and imaginations can be shared and woven into new sensual constructions and practices. (2016, p. 89)

## 11. Collaboration can have strongly negative connotations

Despite the fact that collaboration is generally viewed in a positive light in contemporary society, in the recent past it has had a far more negative connotation. Our general definition, quoted right at the start of this chapter, points to this aspect, noting that the word can mean:

2. to cooperate with or willingly assist an enemy of one's country and especially an occupying force - suspected of *collaborating* with the enemy.

(Collaborate. (n.d.). Retrieved March 28, 2017, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/collaborate>)

In discussing this negative connotation of the word, Simon Murray notes that

...I was reminded that in many political, industrial and military conflicts, the verb 'to collaborate' or the abstract noun 'collaboration' speaks of treachery, betrayal, and - literally and metaphorically - 'sleeping with the enemy'. (2016, p. 30)

Part of the reason for this negative connotation lies in the history of the Second World War, and in particular in Vichy France, under Nazi Occupation. Florian Schneider highlights this, reminding us that

... 'Collaboration' became the slogan of the French Vichy regime after the meeting of Hitler and Marshall Petain ....in 1940. In a radio speech, Petain officially enlisted the French population to 'collaborate' with the German occupiers, while the French resistance movement later branded those who cooperated with the German forces as 'collaborators'. (2007, p. 1)

This notion of working with an enemy of the people, or of the state, continues to colour our interpretation of the concept of collaboration. In South Africa, our history of Apartheid also connects to the negative connotation of collaboration, in a history of collusion with the Apartheid regime's Security Forces and Special Branch. Jane Taylor, in her fascinating account of collaborating with William Kentridge and Handspring Puppet Company, points to the negativity of the notion of collaboration in South Africa:

In South Africa, 'collaborators' were citizens (usually black or legally of 'non-white' status) who had covertly worked for the apartheid state; in particular, it was used as a shorthand for the schizoid identities of those who held citizenship (of a kind) in two states: on the one hand living as a community member subjected to the apartheid law that oppressed them, while simultaneously engaging in pro-apartheid pursuits against the interests of their perceived community, through spying or engaging in secret acts of right-wing terror. (2015, p. 44)

This history in South Africa is still very relevant, and in discussing my own collaborative practice with colleagues and friends, this negative connotation to the word has often been mentioned in the conversation.

This is certainly not a phenomenon that is particular only to France or South Africa, either; many countries have endured such periods of domination by an invading force, or by a totalitarian state. Murray points also to the ways in which collaboration can be seen to work negatively against other interests besides national ones:

So, collaboration as perfidious cooperation with an enemy extends our reading of the term not simply to the leaders and active protagonists of Vichy France between 1940 and 1944, but also, for example, to a Marxist analysis of industrial relations where workers and their trade unions 'collaborate' – against their own 'deep interests' – with management and capital. (2016, p. 30)

Therefore, our concept of collaboration needs to remain cognisant of the ways in which collaboration can be both a negative, and a positive thing, depending on the context in which it happens.

## *12. Collaboration is a neutral term, but it is not a neutral practice – it is Janus-faced*

Jane Taylor points to the ambiguous nature of collaboration, when she characterises it as, “Rather like the two-faced figure of Janus, the term ‘collaboration’ looks in both directions at once” (2015, p. 43). Colin and Sachsenmaier agree, also calling the practice of collaboration ‘Janus-faced’ (2016, p. 8); in both cases, the understanding that collaboration can be both a good or a bad thing, seems to be implicit in their concept of the practice.

Thus, although the word itself can be seen to be neutral, the practice of collaboration cannot. Murray alerts us to the fact that there is no “clear and unified ethical grounding” (2016, p. 30) for collaborative work , and points out that

...collaboration as a practice can - self-evidently – serve different ends and purposes.... It should be clear, therefore, that ‘collaboration’ emerges as a slippery term: a practice whose shape and purpose remains endlessly negotiable and in flux, a highly ideological practice and – like most interesting terms – a site of dispute and contestation. (2016, pp. 33-34)

Collaboration is, as Murray says, ‘ideological’, and therefore, any consideration of collaboration needs to consider carefully the context in which it happens, and the purpose for which it is carried out. With this exhortation ringing in our ears, I can now try to elucidate a broad, nuanced concept of collaboration in general.

## *Conclusions*

Our discussion of collaboration has ranged far and wide across the landscape of the practice, in order to bring us closer to a concept of what it means to collaborate. Based on the discussion above, I am able to move beyond the simple definition of collaboration as ‘working together with others towards a common goal’ which we began with, to the following broad concept of collaboration:

**Collaboration is relational, and allows for a plurality of voices and opinions. It is not always undertaken by choice, but it almost always involves a deliberate choice to collaborate. Thus, collaboration is intentional. At its heart, collaboration involves shared thinking: a meeting of ideas and activities, in order to achieve a shared intention. For this reason, the sum of collaboration is greater than its parts. At the same time, collaboration involves risk, either positively or negatively. Collaboration is immanent, and can be traced from earliest human history; we have always had to work together to survive. While contemporary models of collaboration have their roots in the social ferment of the 1960s, collaboration in the 21st century is an integral part of neo-liberal management strategies and practices. Unlike the 1960s utopian vision of collaboration, in the 21st century it is post-consensual and contingent. Despite its many advantages, collaboration can have strongly negative connotations that are related to the history of the Twentieth Century, in particular. Therefore, collaboration is a neutral term, but it is not a neutral practice; it is Janus-faced, and can be both positive and negative at the same time, depending on the context in which it happens.**

This broad concept can therefore function as the basis of my analysis of my own collaborative practice. However, in order to better understand the role of creativity in my collaborative practice I need also to examine and elucidate a concept of what is called ‘Creative Collaboration’, that is collaboration in which the intention is not just to solve a



problem, but rather to create something almost entirely new, through the shared thinking of the collaborative process. The next chapter will go on to discuss this narrower focus within studies of collaboration.

## Chapter 6

### *Creative Collaboration: “an affair of the mind”*

(Michelle Fine, in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 81)

*“We’re drawn to the image of the lone genius whose mythical moment of insight changes the world. But the lone genius is a myth; instead it’s group genius that generates breakthrough innovation. When we collaborate, creativity unfolds across people; the sparks fly faster, and the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” (Sawyer, 2007, loc 212 of 4016)*

*“Creativity lies in the capacity to see more sharply and with greater insight that which one already knows or that which is buried at the margins of one’s awareness”. (John-Steiner, 1997, pp. 51-52)*

The defining characteristic of the concept of ‘creative collaboration’ is that it is *creative*, in the sense that it engages a pair or a group of people in a task that requires that they not only solve a problem, but that they do so in a new and innovative way. The notion of what *creativity* itself is is slippery, or as Scott G. Isaksen and Mary C. Murdoch term it “a complex, abstract, ‘fuzzy’ concept” (2008, p. 1); most people seem to feel that they know what it is, but would also probably agree that it doesn’t apply to them. So many people I meet, when I tell them I make theatre, will say “Oh, but you must be so creative. I’m not creative at all – I could never do something like that.” The commonly held perception is that creativity is somehow the domain of the special, chosen few; the mad and the gifted. Isaksen and Murdoch point to this aspect of the general understanding of creativity, in their discussion of what they term the “mythology of creativity”,

Some would assert that creativity is a mysterious phenomenon, one which defies systematic analysis and inquiry..... that creativity is a mystical concept ... The implication is that these gifted geniuses have been given a special gift (perhaps through divine intervention) or have been possessed by a muse. ... to be creative, you must be mad, weird, or neurotic. (2008, pp. 1-2)

However, while there is definitely the kind of “Big C” Creativity, which Paul B. Paulus and Bernard A. Nijstad would characterise as “Someone may have a new idea about how to run a country or a company, artists may develop new types of music ..., and scientists may develop new techniques or knowledge that may have a profound impact on society...” (2003, loc 56 of 5206)<sup>52</sup>, they also point to the importance of “little c” creativity, which they define as “creativity in everyday life as people try to solve problems at work or at home or on the road in between” (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003, loc 58 of 5206). Thus, creativity and being *creative* can be seen to permeate many aspects of our everyday lives, far away from the endeavours of the arts and sciences.

Michael P. Farrell, citing the work of Scott G. Isaksen, defines creativity as “linking together two or more ideas so as to produce something new and useful, or something new and beautiful, or both” (2001, pp. 114-115). To my mind, this notion of ‘new and useful, or new and beautiful’ is important. While many would possibly argue that all collaboration involves some kind of creativity, I would posit that the key difference between collaboration in general, and *creative collaboration*, is this drive to create something *new*. Keith Sawyer points to this aspect when he asserts that

...a creative idea or work must be *novel*. Yet novelty is not enough, because a novel idea may be ridiculous or nonsensical; many dreams are novel but rarely

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<sup>52</sup> When consulting certain sources, I have used the Kindle version of the book. In many cases there are no page numbers in the Kindle version, and so I have had to rely on the location system used in Kindle books for my referencing.

have any impact on the world. In addition to novelty, to be creative an idea must be *appropriate*, recognized as socially valuable in some way to some community. [his emphasis] (2003b, p. 20)

Therefore, a definition of creativity needs to encompass both the notion of 'newness' or novelty, and the idea of practical applicability and usefulness; what could be termed 'fit for its purpose'.

The study of creativity, and the creativity of groups in particular, is an interesting field, as it lies at the intersection point of a number of different areas of interest and academic disciplines. Scholars of creativity come from backgrounds as diverse as psychology, sociology, information systems, behavioural sciences, management, and education, among others, as Isaksen and Murdock note:

One of the factors contributing to the complexity of the study of creativity is the interdisciplinary nature of the concept. No single discipline can legitimately claim to have exclusive rights to the study of creativity. Creativity research can be found in the arts as well as in the sciences. In addition, within the disciplines, there are many possible contexts within which to study creativity.... Creativity has been studied in managerial, business and industrial areas; in disciplines such as engineering, mathematics, philosophy, physics, and English. There is also a vast collection of literature on the educational implications of creativity. (Isaksen & Murdock, 2008, p. 4)

Broadly speaking, the history of the study of creativity<sup>53</sup> in the United States of America can be traced back to a Presidential Address by J.P. Guilford, given to the American

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<sup>53</sup> There is a large body of work that deals with the study of creativity, in various parts of the world. Since the key theorists I have used all come out of the American scholarly tradition, my discussion of the history of the study of creativity has also centred around developments in the USA, largely.

Psychological Association in 1950, which challenged American psychology scholars to explore this hitherto neglected area of thought and behaviour (Guildford, 1987; Isaksen & Murdock, 2008). The early research on creativity in the 1950s and 1960s focused on the personality traits of creative people, and attempted to design tests and instruments to identify the components of different types of creative thinking (Sawyer, 2003a, 2003b). Michael Farrell points out that, in this early research,

Many theorists view extraordinary creativity as a talent reserved to a particular type of gifted personality – a ‘genius’. To uncover the sources of genius, these theorists focus on the individual cognitive and emotional processes associated with creative thought. (2001, p. 115)

Vlad Glaveanu calls this paradigm of creativity research “The He-paradigm” (Glaveanu, 2010), which focuses on the figure of the lone genius. The primary focus of this kind of research into creativity was to “develop metrics that could identify exceptional creative talent in childhood, to select individuals that would be more likely to succeed in occupations demanding creativity” (Sawyer R. K., 2003a, p. 5). These efforts met with limited success; there seemed to be little to no correlation between childhood aptitude and creative success in later life (Sawyer R. K., 2003a).

The following phase of creativity research therefore followed a different approach, which Glaveanu calls “The I-paradigm” (Glaveanu, 2010):

In the 1970s and 1980s, a second wave of creativity researchers responded to these disappointments by arguing for a shift in focus from personality to process. This shift was inspired by the ascendance of cognitive psychology, which, in the 1970s, led psychology as a discipline away from a focus on personality and individual differences toward a focus on those mental processes which underlie not only exceptional ability, but also everyday problem-solving and decision-making skills. (Sawyer R. K., 2003a, p. 5)

Once again, the primary focus of this phase of creativity research was the creative process of the individual, and the ways in which the cognitive processes of the individual shaped their creativity.

These theorists assume that creative work occurs within the mind of a single individual, and to explain creativity, they analyse the developmental histories and cognitive processes that characterize the mind of the 'genius'. (Farrell, 2001, p. 115)

However, one of the most influential theories to arise out of this second wave of research into creativity is Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's 'systems model' of creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988/2014), which serves as an ushering-in point for a different view of creativity; one that considered individual creativity within the wider context of a group of thinkers or practitioners. Vlad Gaveanu terms this, "The We-paradigm" of creativity research (Glaveanu, 2010):

In the later 1980s, .... Creativity researchers began to emphasise the need to move beyond a psychological study of the individual creator. Among creativity researchers, this recent development is often attributed to an article published by Mike Csikszentmihalyi in 1988, in which he proposes the 'systems view' of creativity. The creative system is a social system that includes three elements: the *individual*, the social institution or *field*, and the cultural symbol system or *domain* (p. 325). (Sawyer R. K., 2003b, p. 49)

Building on this work, in the late 1980s and moving into the 1990s, there came a distinct shift in creativity research, as more and more researchers began to focus their attention on the ways in which creativity is "as much a cultural and social as it is a psychological event" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1999, p. 313). The publication in 2000 of Vera John-Steiner's book *Creative Collaboration* brought about the beginning of what Sawyer has termed the "sociocultural approach – a focus on contexts, groups, cultures and societies" (Sawyer K. , 2013, p. 87). In an edited collection of letters, published in tribute to John-Steiner's scholarship, Sawyer comments on the significance of her book,

When you began your studies of creative collaboration, there was no precedent for a socio-cultural approach to creativity. You showed true vision by being one of the very first scholars to perceive that the focus on the creative individual was missing the collaborative, active, and embodied reality of creativity. (2013, p. 88)

Thus, the last 30 years has seen a proliferation of theoretical understandings of how creativity happens in pairs, in groups, in social and ‘thought communities’ (John-Steiner, 2000), and across generations, through the influence of what Vera John-Steiner calls ‘distant teachers’ (1997). Increasingly, theorists have come to understand the importance of studying the ways in which groups of people *work together* creatively, in situated, contextualised, and embodied ways. As Michael Farrell observes,

If collaborative groups are so important to people who make original contributions to their disciplines, it would be useful to have a theory that could provide guidelines in forming them. (2001, p. 294)

It is, therefore, this body of work which has had the greatest influence on my thinking about my own practice.

Needless to say, there are a number of researchers whose work examines the idea of creative collaboration, although the field is not a vast one; Keith Sawyer notes that “there are so few creativity researchers that they have no annual conference” (2003b, p. 51). Instead, the field is led by a small group of thinkers whose work is considered seminal in the study of collaborative creativity. Most of these theorists have some background in psychology, but their areas of interest also include education, linguistics, business, management, music, and theatre. My own understanding of creative collaboration has been built on the work of some of these, including Michael Farrell (2001), Keith Sawyer (2003a, 2003b, 2003c, 2007), Warren Bennis and Patricia Ward Biedermann (1997), Paulus B. Paulus and Bernard A. Nijstad (2003), Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi (1988, 1990, 1999, 2007), and (most importantly for my work) Vera John-Steiner (1997, 2000).

Paulus and Nijstad also point to an important aspect of the body of work surrounding creative collaboration, when they note that

The literature relevant to an understanding of group creativity has evolved along a number of different lines in different areas of study and disciplines. Researchers come from the diverse traditions of cognition, groups, creativity, information systems, and organisational psychology. Creativity and cognition researchers have examined the role of social and cognitive influences on the creative process. Organisational researchers have examined team innovation, organisational learning, and knowledge transfer. Group researchers have studied group brainstorming by means of computers. Other group scholars have examined the role of minority influence on creativity and information exchange in groups. These areas have developed largely in isolation and with little integration of the various findings and concepts. (2003, loc 85 of 5206)

This separation between the different types of research into creative collaboration or group creativity has meant that the scholars whose work I have found the most useful are largely grouped under the umbrella of ‘creativity and cognition researchers’. However, Paulus and Nijstad also point out that within this grouping, there are two different types of approach. The first of these is technical and finely detailed:

Much of the research on groups and cognitive creativity is done in laboratory settings and focuses on detailed analyses of social and cognitive processes in the short term. (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003, loc 90 of 5206)

A key example of this kind of approach would be the work of Keith Sawyer, in his detailed analysis of both jazz and improvised theatre performances. The other approach is more descriptive:

Creativity researchers often examine the broader context of creative achievements, such as the careers of highly creative people or several years of work in research teams. (Paulus & Nijstad, 2003, loc 91-92 of 5206)

Key examples of this approach can be found in the work of Vera John-Steiner, Michael Farrell, and Bennis and Biedermann. Their contextualised studies of collaborative creativity



thus allow them to draw a wide range of conclusions about the different forms that such creativity can take. This train of thought and method of study has proved the most useful to me in developing my own understanding of what happens in creative collaboration.

In order to grapple with the various theoretical positions, put forward by these authors, I have once again worked to synthesise and distil some key ideas which will allow me to define what I think creative collaboration is. In order to do so, I have had to construct a series of 'artefacts of thinking', each allowing me to find the common threads that tie the work of the various theorists together.

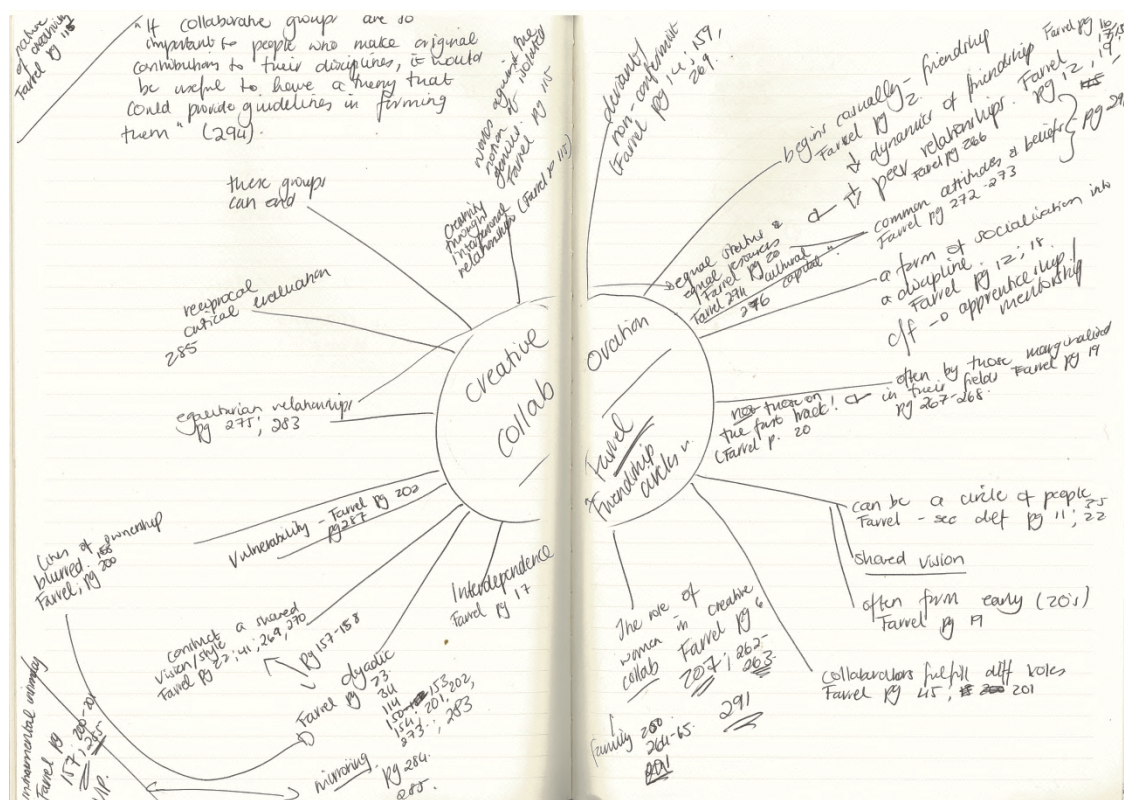


Figure 35: A visual map of Michael Farrell's ideas (Farrell, 2001).





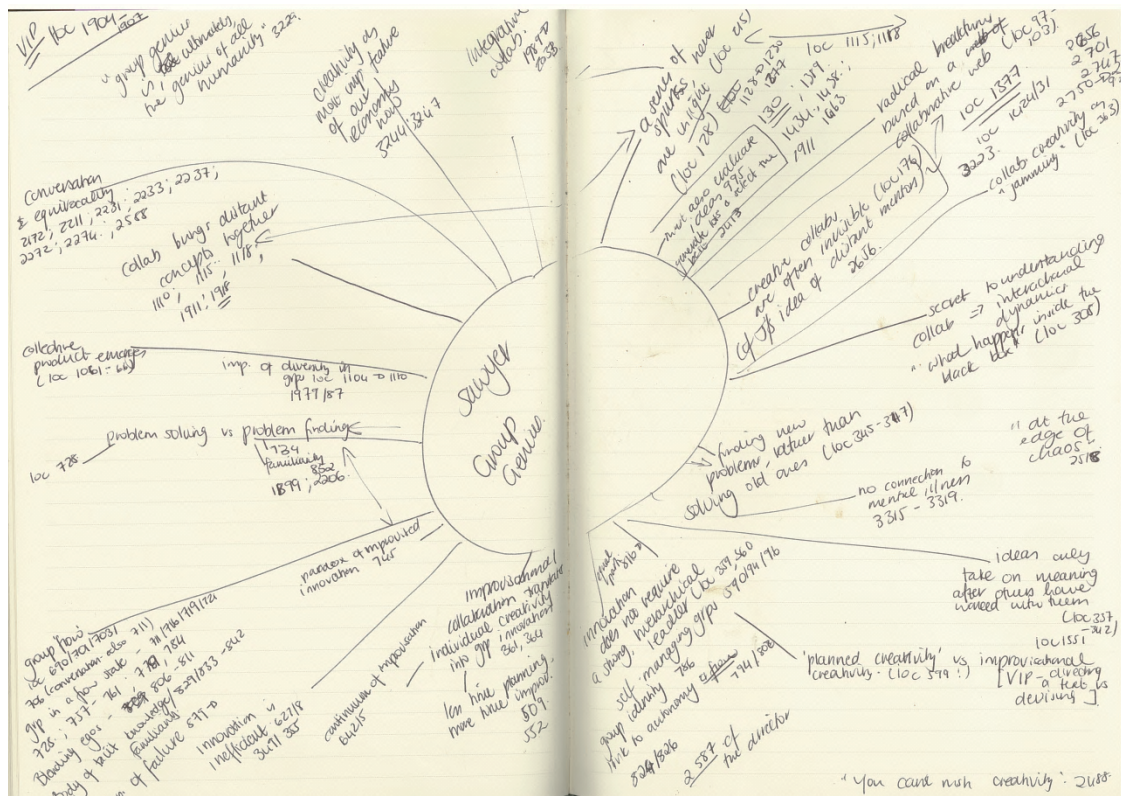


Figure 38: A visual map of Keith Sawyer's Group Genius: The Creative Power of Collaboration (2007).

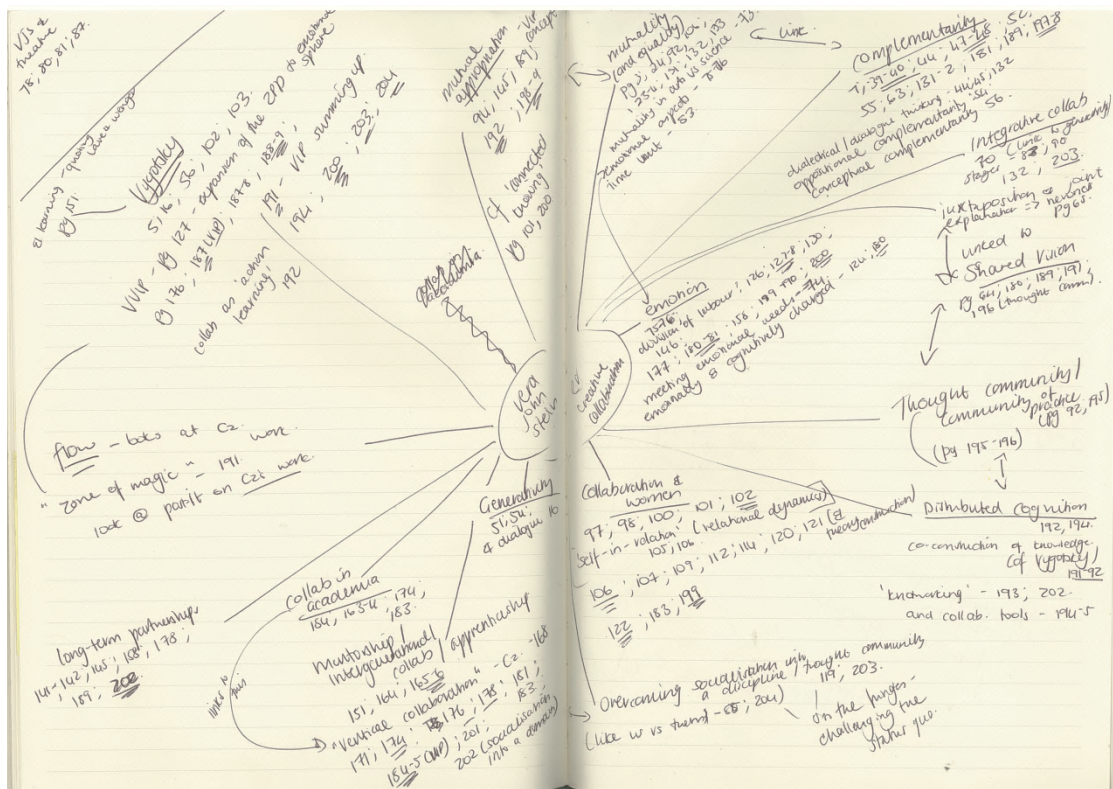


Figure 39: A visual map of Vera John-Steiner's Creative Collaboration (2000).

This complex process of finding my way through dense and unfamiliar psychological theory, has allowed me to extract the following key characteristics of creative collaboration:

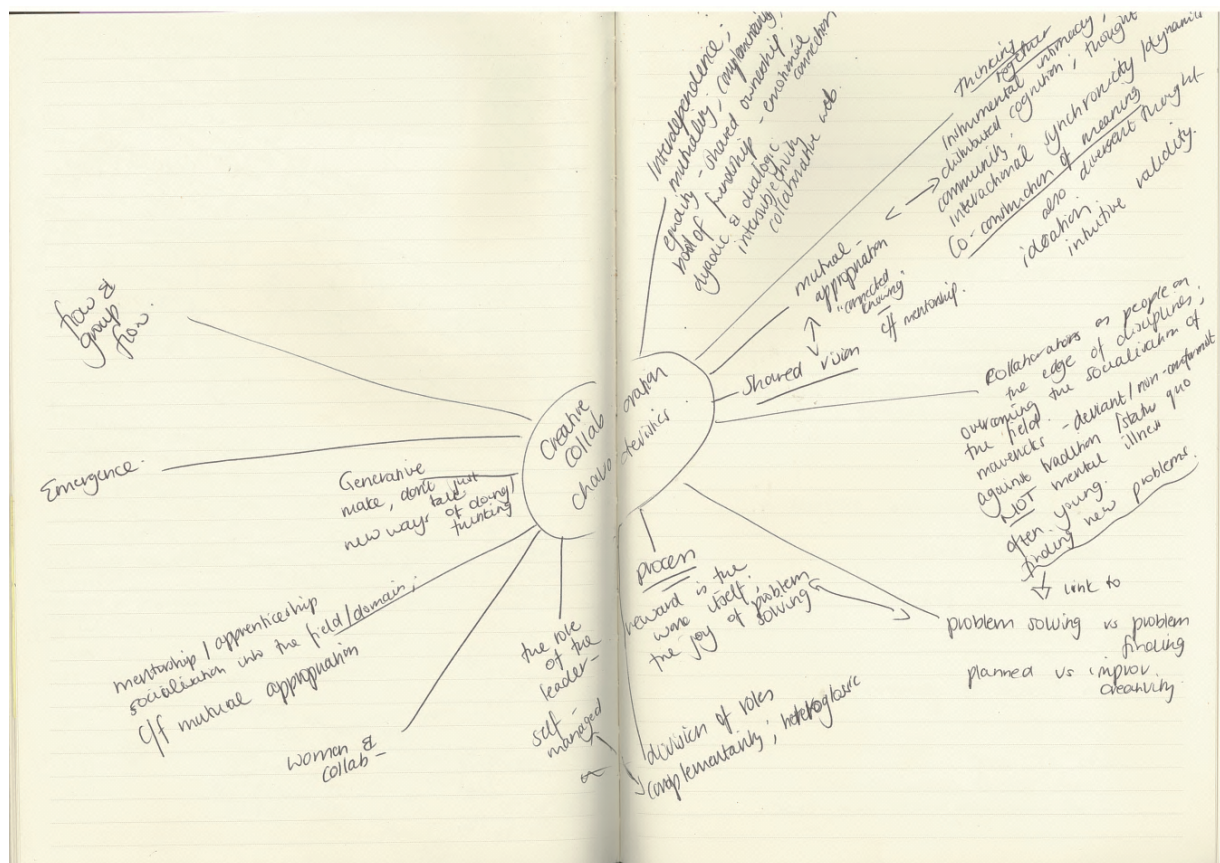


Figure 40: An artefact of thinking about the characteristics of creative collaboration.

# 1. Creative collaboration is often based on friendship, or some other close relationship

As I have detailed in the previous chapter, collaboration is relational, and is thus based on relationship between people. In the case of creative collaboration, case studies show that this relationship is of utmost importance to the process of creative collaboration (John-Steiner, 2000, Farrell, 2001, Bennis & Biederman, 1997). More often than not, studies show that these relationships, even if they begin casually between colleagues, grow to have



enormous significance in the lives of the participants. Michael Farrell, in discussing the nature of friendship in creative collaboration, observes that

A collaborative circle usually begins as a casual association among acquaintances working in the same discipline. Members of a social network meet and find they enjoy one another's company. At first the circle may play a peripheral part in a person's life, no more than a group of companions who provide good conversation and occasional distraction from work. Then, for a variety of reasons, the members escalate their commitment to one another and deepen their interdependence until the circle becomes the centre of their creative lives. Under some conditions, as the circle develops, the dynamics of the group transform the work of the members. Those who are merely good at their discipline become masters, and, working together, very ordinary people make extraordinary advances in their field. (2001, p. 2)

The key idea here, to me, is that the members of such a group, over time, deepen their sense of commitment to each other and their shared work. This is because creative collaboration requires a sense of trust, and emotional connection. Out of this arises what Farrell terms "instrumental intimacy" (2001, p. 151), where members of a group come to trust the other members enough to share with them their "most current, least finished work" (Farrell, 2001, p. 151). Farrell indicates that

Instrumental intimacy occurs when each begins to use the mind of the other as if it were an extension of his own. ... The boundaries between the self and other diminish until the members are able to think out loud together as if they are one person. ... it is common for the participants to find their ideas emerging in a cascading flow, such that neither one knows or cares who thought of the idea first. (2001, pp. 157-158)

This kind of sharing requires that the participants trust each other enough to make themselves vulnerable, and open their ideas to comment and criticism by others; it requires "trust and confidence" (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 190). This sense of being connected emotionally leads to what both Vera John-Steiner (2000) and Michael Farrell (2001) call 'interdependence': the sense of two or more people opening their minds to each other, but

also offering emotional (and sometimes, physical, practical, and financial) support to each other. Thus, their lives become intertwined in ways that make it possible for them to create something new together. Vera John-Steiner points out that “...*collaboration is complex; it is charged both cognitively and emotionally*” [her emphasis] (2000, p. 124), and it is clear from both her and Farrell’s studies of creative collaborators, that this sense of emotional connection is of vital importance to the creative process.

Because of this sense of emotional connection, and the deep sharing of ideas made possible by ‘instrumental intimacy’, it is common for creative collaborators to feel that they are equals within the creative collaboration. This sense of equality does not necessarily mean that they have equal skills, knowledge, or experience<sup>54</sup> (for example, in the vertical collaboration between mentor and student), but rather that there is an equal sense of ownership of the process and product of the creative collaboration (John-Steiner, 2000, Farrell, 2001, Bennis & Biederman, 1997). As Bennis and Biedermann observe, “In a true creative collaboration, almost everyone emerges with a sense of ownership” (1997, p. 28).

Both the sense of interdependence, and of equal ownership of the work, relate back to John-Steiner’s notion of mutuality, which I have discussed earlier. She notes that “mutuality and equality in roles are considered important defining characteristics of effective collaboration” (2000, p. 24).

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<sup>54</sup> Citing the work of Bourdieu (1993), Farrell describes this inequality as an imbalance in the amount of economic, social, and cultural capital held by each of the participants.

## *2. Creative collaboration depends on a shared vision*

Almost all of the theorists whose work I have consulted in developing my understanding of creative collaboration, highlight the importance of a shared vision in creative collaboration. John-Steiner call this shared vision “A joint, passionate interest in a new problem, art form, or societal challenge” (2000, p. 189). Farrell elaborates on this idea, observing that

A collaborative circle is a primary group consisting of peers who share similar occupational goals and who, through long periods of dialogue and collaboration, negotiate a common vision that guides their work... For a group of artists, the shared vision might be a new style. For a group of scientists, it may be a new theoretical paradigm. (2001, p. 11)

Thus, for Farrell the sense of shared vision encompasses not only the goal of the work, but also the way in which the participants view the entirety of what Csikszentmihalyi calls the “field” and the “domain” (1988/2014). Csikszentmihalyi goes on to explain that

Without a culturally defined domain of action in which innovation is possible, the person cannot even get started. And without a group of peers to evaluate and confirm the adaptiveness of the innovation [the field], it is impossible to differentiate what is creative from what is simply statistically improbable or bizarre. (1988/2014, p. 48)

Therefore, for Farrell the shared vision of the group encompasses not only the ‘what’, or the aim of the collaboration but also the ‘how’, which describes the participants’ ways of seeing their discipline, and the world in general.

For Bennis and Biedermann, this sense of a shared vision lies at the heart of what drives creative collaboration

A dream is at the heart of every Great Group<sup>55</sup>. It is always a dream of greatness, not simply an ambition to succeed. The dream is the engine that drives the group, the vision that inspires the team to work as if the fate of civilization rested on getting its revolutionary new computer out of the door. The dream – a new kind of entertainment, a new political era, a radical new take on what learning is all about – is a kind of contract, a mutual understanding that the process itself, will be worth the effort to create it. The dream is also a promise on the visionary's part that the goal is attainable. (1997, pp. 19-20)

In this way, shared vision lies at the basis for all creative collaborative action; it is what spurs the collaborators to action, and what sustains their efforts in the face of opposition, failure, and despair.

### *3. Creative collaboration involves the co-construction of meaning*

In the earlier section of this chapter, in my discussion of the nature of collaboration, I pointed to the importance of what John-Steiner calls “ joint thinking” (2000, p. 3). John-Steiner also refers to this sense of two (or more) minds working together as “connected knowing” (2000, p. 101& 200) , which she explains as follows,

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<sup>55</sup> Bennis and Biedermann use this term to describe creative collaborations, saying that “In these creative alliances, the leader and the team are able to achieve something together that neither could achieve alone.” (1997, p. 2.). Their book looks carefully at the work and dynamics of seven of these Great Groups, which they identify because “Each achieved or produced something spectacularly new, and each was widely influential, often sparking creative collaboration elsewhere. To echo Steve Jobs, ... each of these groups ‘put a dent in the universe’.” (Bennis & Biederman, 1997, p. 4) .



...separate knowing is based on an epistemology of critical reasoning, while connected knowing relies on an integration of perception, insight, analogies, and empathetic understanding. (2000, p. 101)

John-Steiner goes on to expand upon this idea, by linking it to the concept of 'distributed cognition' which is a fairly new area of study within Vygostkian and Cognitive scholarship<sup>56</sup>; she explains this is as the study of "thinking as social practice" (2000, p. 192). To me, the simplest way to describe this is to quote mathematician Phil Davis, who says "[Working with a partner,] it is almost as if I have two brains" (quoted in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 190). To me, this idea links back to Farrell's concept of 'instrumental intimacy'; thinking together in this manner requires that each participant open their mind to each other, which requires trust and vulnerability. As John-Steiner observes, "Living in the other's mind requires trust and confidence" (2000, p. 190).

Implicit in this shared or joint thinking, is the concept of the co-construction of meaning. If two (or more) minds are working together creatively, then the meanings of their ideas and their insights have to be constructed through dialogue and mutual meaning-making. Sawyer points out that in group creativity

Even a single idea can't be attributed to one person because ideas don't take on their full importance until they're taken up, reinterpreted, and applied by others. ... Individual creative actions take on meaning only later, after they are woven into other ideas, created by other actors. In a creative collaboration, each person acts [and I would add, thinks] without knowing what his or her action [or

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<sup>56</sup> There is no space to discuss this concept in great detail; while it is a fascinating area of study, which looks at the ways in which cognition can be distributed amongst members of a group, or through interaction with forces and objects outside of the individual mind, the idea is only of use to me in the sense that John-Steiner has used it.

thought] means. Participants are willing to allow other people to give their action [or idea] meaning by building on it later. (Sawyer, 2007, loc 337 of 4016)

John-Steiner, quoting the work of Karl Wieck, refers to this notion of the negotiation of meaning through joint thinking as “collective sensemaking”, and highlights the fact that “...shared experience leads to engagement with culture, the need to make sense, telling stories about joint experiences” (2000, p. 193).

John-Steiner points to the significance of this ‘collective sensemaking’, when she posits the idea that “*the juxtaposition and joint exploration of ideas are crucial for constructing a new paradigm in art or science*” [her emphasis] (2000, p. 65). She goes on to term the sharing of ideas between a group of connected people ‘a thought community’, and explains that “Thought communities enable participants to engage in the co-construction of knowledge as interdependent intellectual and emotional processes” (2000, p. 196). This sharing of thoughts, ideas, and meanings is essential for creative collaboration; it is the very nature of the shared thinking that allows new and interesting insights, ideas, and meanings to arise.

#### *4. Creative collaboration involves learning from each other*

In creating a sense of shared thinking, and in the co-construction of meaning, creative collaborators also engage in a process of shared learning. Vera John-Steiner calls this ‘mutual appropriation’, and observes that

In collaborative endeavours we learn from each other by teaching what we know; we engage in mutual appropriation. Solo practices are insufficient to meet the challenges and new complexities of classrooms, parenting, and the changing workplace. (2000, p. 192)

Thus, in working together creatively, and in constructing new ways of seeing and thinking about the world, participants are engaged in a continuous process of learning from one another's ideas and bodies of knowledge. In this way, John-Steiner observes, each participant has the opportunity to grow and expand their own range of skills and ideas; "part of the power of collaboration is that it provides for mutual appropriation, that is, expansion of skills, roles, leadership, and working styles by close partners" (2000, p. 145).

To my mind, what John-Steiner implies is that 'mutual appropriation' goes beyond just a sharing of ideas. Rather, it is one of the key goals of the interdependence of creative collaboration:

In collaborative endeavours, mutual appropriation is a result of sustained engagement during which partners hear, struggle with, and reach for one another's thoughts and ideas. ... Mutual appropriation, then, implies a very particular form of human interdependence that takes years to be fully realized. (2000, p. 199)

As a leading Vygotskian scholar, John-Steiner's work connects this to the Vygotskian notion of knowledge as socially constructed

I rely on L.S. Vygotsky's cultural-historical ideas that creative activities are social, that thinking is not confined to the individual brain/mind, and that the construction of knowledge is embedded in the cultural and historical milieu in which it arises. (2000, p. 5)

While this is a crucial point, and one that is foundational to my own understandings, I am not going to discuss it further here, but will expand upon this in Section 3 of this study.

One very important form of 'mutual appropriation' takes place in what John-Steiner calls mentorship (2000), or what Csikszentmihalyi calls 'vertical collaboration' (in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 168), which is the intergenerational learning that can take place within creative collaborations between parents and children, husbands and wives, life partners, or

professors and their students, among others<sup>57</sup>. In her concept of mentorship, John-Steiner also includes the notion of what she calls “distant teachers” (1997) ; these are people from whom we can learn, though we never actually meet them. She cites the example given by many women writers of being ‘taught’ their craft by the novels of Jane Austen and Virginia Woolf (1997, p. 208), and by many actors of the deep influence that Shakespeare has had on their work (1997, pp. 56 - 57), and observes that

The intense focus upon the work of an accomplished person or persons yields insights that are not easily acquired in the more traditional settings of learning... Immersing oneself in the works of a predecessor and retracing his or her path, yields a useful counterpoint to the cafeteria of school learning for the person preparing for a creative life. Dialogues across generations are one form of focused learning ... (1997, p. 208)

To me, this relates to what Sawyer calls the “professional socialisation” into the domain (to use Csikszentmihalyi’s terminology) (Sawyer, 2003c, loc 3806 of 5563); the long process of learning about our discipline and our practice through interaction with our teachers (both distant and present), our mentors, and our peers.

### *5. Creative collaboration attracts people who are divergent and non-conformist thinkers*

At its heart, creative collaboration is a divergent, non-conformist act. Vera John-Steiner points to this aspect, when she says

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<sup>57</sup> Vera John-Steiner explicitly links this to the Vygotskian notion of the Zone of Proximal Development, which will be discussed in greater detail in Section 3 of this thesis.

But in engaging in collaboration in Western societies, partners need to shed some of their cultural heritage, such as the powerful belief in a separate, independent self and in the glory of individual achievement. These are deeply ingrained in us. When partners commit themselves to collaboration, they challenge these beliefs. *The very effort to work together, to risk an undertaking that is so different from the norm, is a creative act.* [my emphasis] (2000, p. 204)

Both Farrell (2001) and Bennis and Beidermann (1997) echo this, pointing to the fact that creative collaborators are often mavericks; on the periphery of their discipline, “marginalised in their fields” (Farrell, 2001, p. 19), outsiders to the centre, and “never insiders or corporate types on the fast-track: They are always on their *own* track” [their emphasis] (Bennis & Biederman, 1997, p. 21). As Farrell observes

Collaborative circles usually do not form among people on the fast track. ...those who rise rapidly in a field are usually focussed on winning the approval of established authorities in their discipline. Because they are more comfortable with authorities, they are likely to be protégés of an established mentor.... Rather than form a rebellious circle and create a new vision, protégés often reaffirm or elaborate the visions of their mentors. (2001, p. 20)

Bennis and Biedermann in particular discuss at length the ways in which these Great Groups can be seen to be ‘deviant’, in the sense that they consciously separate themselves from others; “Creative collaborators become members of their own tribe, with their own language, in-jokes, dress, and traditions” (Bennis & Biederman, 1997, p. 28). This sense of ‘separate-ness’, the sense of ‘us vs. them’ is one that is common to many of these creative groups, and is often evidenced through such external signs as how they dress and the environment they work in,

As one Great Group after another has shown, talented people don’t need fancy facilities. It sometimes seems that any old garage will do. ... The casual dress so typical of people in extraordinary groups may be symbolic as well, a sign that they’re unconventional thinkers, engaged in something revolutionary. Jeans and

a T-shirt have become a uniform for people in innovative groups. (1997, pp. 211-212)

As Bennis and Biedermann point out, in such spaces, and among such groups, “dissent is encouraged, if only because it serves the spirit of discovery that is at the heart of these enterprises” (1997, p. 28).

In discussing Darryl Chubin’s work on scientific specialities, Farrell observes that

...people in marginal positions in a discipline are more likely to be a source of new ideas than are people at the center (sic). Perhaps because they have been marginalized, they are more tolerant of experimentation and deviant visions in a field. ... If we view collaborative circles as new forms of life, we could say that they evolve in the dark valleys, rather than on the brightly lit peaks of a discipline. ...the valleys are where collaborative circles of peers create new visions. (2001, p. 268)

In these metaphorical valleys, creative collaborators often work to counter the prevailing tradition or status quo of their discipline. John-Steiner notes that “A crucial advantage of collaboration is the strength it provides to overcome one’s socialisation into a discipline and a thought community” (2000, p. 119). Thus, working together with other like-minded rebels, allows creative collaborators to ‘think outside the box’ of the received wisdom of their discipline.

Unsurprisingly, this iconoclastic aspect of creative collaboration has often led to it being associated with some form of mental illness; as we said earlier, creativity has long been associated with people who do not fit the mould, who are mad, and gifted, and ‘special’ in some way. However, creativity research as a discipline largely rejects this idea. Sawyer observes that

When I speak to audiences about ... creativity, .... I always hear the same questions: Aren’t most creative people mentally ill, or at the very least,

nonconformists? Aren't there people who will be creative no matter what they choose to do? ... These questions reveal the amazing power and persistence of the myth of the lone genius.

This myth isn't only wrong; it's also dangerous ... (2007, loc 3308 of 4016)

Another important aspect of the marginal nature of collaborative creativity, which is noted by a number of theorists, is that creative collaborative groups are often formed when participants are relatively young, and in the early stages of their career; both Farrell and Bennis and Biedermann point to the importance of this in their analysis of creative collaborations. Farrell observes that "most collaborative circles form when their members are in their twenties or early thirties" (2001, p. 19), while Bennis and Biedermann point out that most participants in the Great Groups they study were under the age of 35. They go on to observe that

Such groups are often youthful, filled with talented people who have not yet bumped up against their limits or other dispiriting life lessons. They don't know yet what they can't do. Indeed, they're not sure the impossible exists. (1997, p. 209)

Because of this sense of limitless possibility, and also probably because they simply don't know what will or won't work in any given situation, Sawyer also points out that such groups, "are good at finding new problems rather than simply solving old ones" (Sawyer K., 2007, loc 347 of 4016).

## *6. Creative collaboration involves both problem-finding and problem-solving*

It is widely accepted that the purpose of most collaborations, is to solve specific problems. Often, these problems are ones posed by the context within which the group works. On the other hand, as we have seen in the previous paragraph, creative collaboration

can also be a way to find new problems. Keith Sawyer, who writes extensively about the differences between problem-finding and problem-solving creativity, explains the difference between these two forms, using business teams and improvised theatre and jazz as two extremes of each type;

Business teams are expected to solve specific problems. ...If the goal is well understood and can be explicitly stated, it's a *problem-solving* creative task. .... Jazz and improv groups are at the other extreme. The only goal is intrinsic to the performance itself – to perform well and to entertain the audience. This is *problem-finding creativity* because the group have to 'find' and define the problem as they're solving it. ... many of the most radical innovations occur when the question or goal isn't known in advance. (2007, loc 728 of 4016)

Thus, Sawyer identifies a 'continuum of improvisation' (2007), and links this to the idea of a paradox of improvised innovation;

The key to improvised innovation is managing a paradox; establishing a goal that provides a focus for the team – just enough of one so that team members can tell when they move closer to a solution – but one that's open-ended enough for problem-finding creativity to emerge... (2007, loc 745 of 4016)

To me, this is a very important concept. Sawyer is certainly not the only theorist to discuss the notion of 'problem-finding' in particular, but I have found his discussion the most interesting, as it is based largely in his study of improvisation, which forms an essential part of theatre-making as a process, as we have seen in Section 1. In considering the difference between problem-solving and problem-finding in the theatre, Sawyer explains

...consider a traditional theatre performance, perhaps a play by Shakespeare, where the actors start with a script, with memories of past performances by other companies – the long tradition of Shakespearean theatre. This type of performance is at the problem-solving end of the spectrum, because the 'problem' is well-specified: to create a successful performance of the script. In contrast, in improvisation the actors have to create everything; the dramatic



elements emerge from the dialogue, in a problem-finding process that is collaborative and emergent. (2003c, loc 2340 of 5563)

What is interesting and useful, is that Sawyer does not place these two concepts in opposition to one another, making one 'good' and the other 'bad'; rather, he sees them as comprising a continuum, along which various types of creative collaboration can be placed, depending on the type of approach. As he points out

... in most creative genres, the creative process is a constant balance between finding a problem and solving that problem, and then finding a new problem during the solving of the last one. (2003c, loc 2557 of 556)

By implication, creative collaboration can involve both problem-finding and problem-solving, as different phases of the same creative process.

### *7. Creative collaboration is process-focused*

A number of theorists point to the importance of the consideration of 'process' in our study of creative collaboration. Traditionally, research into the arts in particular has focussed almost entirely on the *products* of a creative process; thus, the object of study has been the painting, or the sculpture, or the play text. However, this perspective is rapidly changing, as researchers increasingly begin to understand that, as Sawyer puts it (in speaking specifically of improvisational creativity) "the process is the product" (2003c, loc 255 of 5563). For Sawyer, the focus of our research into creativity, and group creativity in particular, has to be on the process itself, not on the product that the process creates; "...in group creativity, the process is the essence of the genre, and it must be the focus of any scientific study" (2003c, loc 261 of 5563). Sawyer admits that this is a shift in focus in creativity research, and at the time of the publication of *Group Creativity*, it was considered to be a new avenue of research. Sawyer links this idea of 'the process as the product' to the work of socio-cultural theorists, among which is Vera John-Steiner, and Sawyer himself, to some extent. He elaborates on this notion in his discussion of improvised theatre, saying

the meaning of an individual act emerges from the collective creativity of the group, and the performance that results is a collaborative product. The creativity does not originate in one performer's head, then become externalized and imposed on the other performers; rather, *the creativity is found in the group process*. Group creativity occurs on a collaborative, social plane, rather than in performer's heads. [my emphasis] (2003c, loc 335 of 5563)

In seeking to understand the processes of creative collaboration, Sawyer challenges us to look inside the collaboration by looking "inside the box, in moment-to-moment interactional dynamics.... [which is] A time-consuming method of analyzing verbal gestures, body language, and conversation during collaboration" (2007, loc 308 – 313 of 401). While my own study certainly does not engage with Sawyer's laborious method of analysis, I strongly agree with his perspective that it is the process of creative collaboration that is interesting, rather than the product itself. Perhaps this is because my own experience of making theatre is so rooted in the process which I enjoy enormously, as discussed in Section 1 of this thesis.

This sense of enjoyment of the *process* is highlighted in Bennis and Biedermann's work, as their research shows that

Great work is its own reward. Great Groups are involved in solving hard, meaningful problems. Paradoxically, that process is difficult but exhilarating as well. Some primal human urge to explore and discover, to see new relationships and turn them into wonderful new things drives these groups. The payoff is not money, or even glory .... The reward is the creative process itself. (1997, pp. 214 - 215)

This idea that the reward for creative collaboration is not monetary gain, but rather the pleasure of the work itself, recurs again and again in the case-studies presented by Bennis and Biedermann. As they observe

Life in the group is often the most fun members ever have. They revel in the pleasure that comes from exercising all their wits in the company of people, as Kay said of his colleagues at PARC, 'used to dealing lighting with both hands'. Communities based on merit and passion are rare, and people who have been in them never forget them. And then there is the sheer exhilaration of performing greatly. Talent wants to exercise itself, *needs* to. ... In a Great Group you are liberated for a time from the prison of the self. .... Genius is rare, and the chance to exercise it in a dance with others is rarer still. [their emphasis] (1997, p. 29)

This sense of 'dancing with others' lies at the heart of the process of creative collaboration, and is the key focus of research into this kind of creativity, and its greatest reward.

Another important aspect of the process of creative collaboration is the understanding put forward by both Sawyer (2007) and Bennis and Biedermann (1997), that creative collaborations do not thrive under conditions of hierarchical management. Their research shows that these groups function best as "self-managing" (Sawyer, 2007, loc 590 of 4016). This does not mean that these groups are leaderless, but rather that the role of the leader is different in creative collaboration than it might be in other types of working groups

The manager of a traditional team is responsible for breaking down the task, keeping everyone on schedule, and coordinating the team members. But the leader of a collaborative team couldn't be more different; this leader has to establish creative spaces within which group genius is more likely to happen... leaders of innovative groups are active participants in the work; they function more like a peer than a boss. (Sawyer, 2007, loc 594 of 4016)

Bennis and Biedermann characterise this kind of leadership as being like that of the impresario or the curator; the person with the uncanny ability to bring the right elements together in order to allow magic to happen. As they point out, "Effective leaders allow great people to do the work they were born to do" (1997, p. 210) . Thus, the manager or leader of a creative collaboration has to facilitate the bringing together of the right people, under the right conditions, and to allow the process of creative collaboration to unfold. This does not

mean that they themselves are not creators within the team – often they are active and engaged participants in the process – but rather than they have an extra creative talent. Bennis and Biedermann report that Xerox’s chief scientist, Jack Goldman had the following observation pinned to his office wall

There are two ways of being creative. One can sing and dance. Or one can create an environment in which singers and dancers flourish. (1997, p. 77)

As we have seen, engendering this kind of environment allows the process of creative collaboration to happen in ways that remain, to most outside observers, something of a mystery.

### *8. Creative collaboration is generative*

While creative collaboration is focused on the process itself, we can also understand creative collaboration to be generative, in that it is aimed at making something new; thus, it generates, innovates, and produces some kind product. This product can be an object, such as a new computer, it can be a new style or way of doing things, such as Cubism in fine art, or it can be a new idea or understanding of the world. In each case, collaboration *makes* something. As Bennis and Biedermann observe

Great Groups don’t just talk about things (although they often do that at considerable length). They make things – amazing, original things, .... The thing being made has many uses within the group. It incarnates the dream, but it is something real, distinct from the people who are creating it, yet shaped by their hands. (1997, p. 214)

Thus, in creative collaboration “a collective product emerges that could not even in theory be created by an individual” (Sawyer, 2007, loc 1061 of 4016). As we have seen earlier in this chapter, in creative collaboration there is a sense of equal ownership of the process and the product. Thus, the collective products that are generated by creative collaboration can be seen to belong to all of the participants:

These group creations cannot be attributed to the creative insight of a single individual. Rather, these products emerge from the collective activity of the group... the group itself becomes a creative agent, originating novel creative ideas that can only be thought of as group property. (Sawyer, 2003c, loc 1490 of 5563)

### *9. Creative collaboration is emergent*

The quality of emergence is extremely difficult to define. It is a slippery concept, one that shifts in response to the way we look at it. Almost all of the theorists consulted in this section of my study speak of creativity as 'emergent', but few of them try to define what they mean by this. To me, the concept of emergence has to do with the bringing into being of something new. Merriam-Webster defines it (in part) as "arising as a natural or logical consequence, or newly formed or prominent" (Emergent. (n.d.). Retrieved October 23, 2017, from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/emergent>). Thus, it is something new, that arises as a natural or logical consequence of some kind of action. However, my own sense of the meaning of the word also includes the notion that something that is emergent is in a continuous state of becoming; that it is never completed, but always coming into being.

The most complete discussion of emergence in creative collaboration can be found in Sawyer's work. Sawyer points out that

In the early twentieth century, philosophers defined emergence as the creation of something new that was unpredictable, even given a full and complete knowledge of the world prior to its emergence. (2003b, p. 12)

Sawyer's work on emergence therefore grapples with this definition in the context of creative collaboration. In his valuable discussion, Sawyer identifies a number of key similarities between the notions of creativity and emergence:

- Both creativity and emergence are processes that occur through time
- The result of emergence and creativity is a novel product – something that did not exist before
- The product of creativity and emergence is unpredictable
- The whole of both emergence and creativity is greater than the sum of the parts
- Both emergence and creativity are focused on process rather than product (2003b, 2003c)

Creativity and emergence can therefore be seen to be inter-related processes which result in the creation of something new. Consequently, Sawyer characterises creative collaboration as emergent, particularly in the case of improvised creativity such as Jazz or Improvised theatre performance (these form the basis of almost all of Sawyer's work). In this sense, he observes that

In social interaction, as in group creativity, an 'emergent' is generated by the symbolic interaction of the group. The emergent is ephemeral, changes with each utterance, and emerges from collective interaction. (2003c, loc 2677 of 5563)

In this way, we can understand creative collaboration to be emergent in the sense that, at its most basic level, it brings into being something that is new, unpredictable, and greater than the sum of the parts of the group itself.

### *10. Creative collaboration involves 'flow'*

One of the most important concepts to have come out of the study of creativity, is the notion of 'flow'. This idea is one of the key insights into the creative process put forward by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, and has rapidly become accepted into popular culture and common parlance. Csikszentmihalyi defines the state of flow as follows:

Flow denotes the holistic sensation present when we act with total involvement. It is the kind of feeling after which one nostalgically says: “that was fun,” or “that was enjoyable.” It is the state in which action follows upon action according to an internal logic which seems to need no conscious intervention on our part. We experience it as a unified flowing from one moment to the next, in which we feel in control of our actions, and in which there is little distinction between self and environment; between stimulus and response; or between past, present, and future. (2014, pp. 136 - 137)

Later, he goes on to explain the state of flow as a form of what he calls *optimal activity*:

Flow is a subjective state that people report when they are completely involved in something to the point of forgetting time, fatigue, and everything else but the activity itself. It is what we feel when we read a well-crafted novel or play a good game of squash, or take part in a stimulating conversation. The defining feature of flow is intense experiential involvement in moment-to-moment activity. Attention is fully invested in the task at hand, and the person functions at his or her fullest capacity. (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p. 230)

Csikszentmihalyi refers to this as an *autotelic activity*, or “things people seem to do for the activity’s own sake” (2014, p. 229). Thus, the state of flow is a state of complete absorption in, and enjoyment of a specific task. I am certainly aware that ‘flow’ exists in my own life, both in my work in the theatre, and in my personal life. As an example of this, I love to knit, but I am definitely what is commonly called a ‘process knitter’, which means that I knit because of the sensory experience of knitting, which I find soothing and deeply satisfying, rather than for any particular need for a new item of knitted clothing<sup>58</sup>. When I knit, I like to work on items that are challenging in their stitch pattern, colouring, or construction; as I grapple with the geometry of the knitted piece (knitting is remarkably mathematical), I also gain sensory input from the passage of the yarn through my hands, and I am aware of a feeling of great pleasure in what I am doing. To me, this is ‘flow’. I feel the same way in the

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<sup>58</sup> Since I live in the sub-tropics, the need for heavy woollens is very rare indeed!

rehearsal room, or when I sit backstage and call the cues for a show – that sense of being completely absorbed in what I am doing, the sense that time and the rest of my life simply disappear, the sense of deep joy in what I am doing. To me, this sense of what Csikszentmihalyi calls ‘flow’ or ‘optimal experience’ is a vital part of the pleasure of the creative process.

Both Vera John- Steiner (2000) and Sawyer (2003c; 2007) consider the notion of flow within their analysis of creative collaboration. However, it is Sawyer’s discussion that is the most useful for my purposes, as he introduces the concept of ‘group flow’:

When a group is performing at its peak, I refer to the group as being in *group flow*, ... The concept of group flow is related to Csikszentmihalyi’s flow but with a critical difference. Csikszentmihalyi intended flow to represent a state of consciousness within the individual performer, whereas group flow is a property of the entire group as a collective unit. ... In group flow, everything seems to come naturally; the performers are in interactional synchrony. In this state, each of the group members can feel as if they are able to anticipate what their fellow performers will do before they do it. (2003c, loc 1113 of 5563)

To me, this relates back to the notion of “joint thinking” and “connected knowing” (John-Steiner, 2000), that was discussed earlier; the idea that group members become so attuned to each other’s thoughts and feelings that they are able to enter a state of mutual flow. Sawyer calls this state “a magical kind of high” (2003c, loc 1169 of 5563), which reflects Csikszentmihalyi’s conception of flow as autotelic. In this state, the group are completely immersed in the joy of their task , sparking ideas off each other in a close interplay between creative minds that generates a deep sense of pleasure; this is the dance of genius that Bennis and Biedermann (1997) have evoked.



### *11. Creative collaboration is often gendered.*

Almost all the theorists that I have consulted in my study of creative collaboration agree that there is something qualitatively different in the ways in which men and women collaborate creatively. As Bennis and Biedermann observe “women have created some extraordinary groups” (1997, p. 13). Sadly, there are fewer examples of creative collaboration that involve groups of women, which, as Farrell points out, is partly a result of the forces of history:

In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, women were excluded from collaborative circles in most disciplines. It was rare to find women included in the café discussions of the Impressionists or in the private chambers of the Oxford dons. (2001, p. 6)

However, as both Vera John-Steiner (2000) and Michael Farrell (2001) point out, this exclusion from public, artistic, and intellectual life has not meant that women are incapable of effective creative collaboration; in fact, the very opposite is true. Both John-Steiner and Farrell have found that the ways in which women are socialised actually make them better able to embrace a state of interdependence and mutuality, while men are often socialised more strongly in an adversarial mode. Farrell comments that

... like women’s friendships, collaborative circles of women may be more intimate, less competitive, less hierarchical, and more enduring than those of men. It may be that some of the ingredients that characterize successful collaborative circles, such as collaborative pairing and instrumental intimacy, are more readily found in women’s friendships. (2001, p. 207)

John-Steiner argues strongly against the notion that this difference between the sexes in creative collaboration is biologically determined, and points to the important ways in which women are socialised to work together

I argue that mutuality and interdependence are part of all human life, male and female. But in modern America and other industrialized Western nations, many males experience a powerful push toward independence, competition and autonomy. Women, on the other hand, have been made responsible for maintaining the social fabric. ... Women's primary responsibility for private life, especially childcare, has contributed to their awareness of interdependence. (2000, p. 122)

Thus, for women who work together creatively, the relational, mutual, interdependent nature of the relationship may be more natural and easy, than it would be for most men. Interestingly, many of the studies I have looked at have set the life-span of a creative collaboration at about 10 years. However, both Farrell and John-Steiner document that many collaborations between women last for far longer, which may also be due to the greater degree of intimacy that characterises women's creative collaborations.

Both theorists therefore find that the ways in which women work together creatively is quite distinct from the more 'male' mode of creative collaboration. As John-Steiner wryly observes, "male-type autonomy itself is possible only when scaffolded by caregivers and partners - often women - who support the man's questing for fulfilment" (2000, p. 106). Because of these powerful forces of socialisation, women are "more at ease with interdependent modes of work" (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 100). In her analysis of the differences between 'male' and 'female' modes of creative collaboration, John-Steiner invokes the feminist notion of 'self-in-relation', and quotes Janet Surrey who says

Our conception of self-in-relation involves the recognition that, for women, the primary experience of self is relational, that is, the self is organized and developed in the context of important relationships. (Surrey, 1991, in John-Steiner, 2000, p. 105)

While my own study does not necessarily engage with feminism as such, this notion resonates with my own experiences as a creative collaborator. For women, the state of

being 'in-relation' is so ingrained into the ways that we are socialised, that acts of collaboration seem almost instinctive on some level.

## *Conclusions*

Once again, as with the previous section of this chapter, these eleven characteristics have allowed me to sketch the following broad concept of creative collaboration:

**Creative collaboration is based on mutual, interdependent friendships or close relationships. These relationships involve a deep level of trust and confidence, which allows participants to share their ideas freely, with an equal sense of ownership of the process and the product of creative collaboration. Creative collaboration depends on a shared vision, which encompasses both a shared goal, and a shared view of the domain and field in which that goal is to be achieved. Through the process of shared thinking, creative collaboration involves the co-construction of meaning, which is the basis upon which new and interesting insights, ideas, and meanings are built. Creative collaboration involves learning from each other, through a process of mutual appropriation. In mentorship collaborations, this learning can be an important part of a person's socialisation into their chosen discipline. Creative collaboration attracts people who are divergent and non-conformist thinkers; these are people who are iconoclastic, and are willing to work outside of the conventional ways of doing things in their discipline. Because of this approach, creative collaboration involves both problem-finding and problem-solving, in a complex, ongoing, and iterative process. In creative collaboration, the process is the product, and is the central focus of research. Creative collaboration is generative, and emergent, as it is concerned with the making of something that is new, practical, and unpredictable. Creative collaboration involves 'flow', which is an optimal, autotelic activity. Because of the different ways that men and women are socialised, creative collaboration is often gendered, with**

**marked differences between the ways in which men and women collaborate creatively.**

It is therefore clear that my discussion in these two chapters has generated two broad conceptual understandings, which will allow me to understand my own collaborative theatre-making practice, and examine who I am as a collaborator, more effectively. The various characteristics that have been discussed here will now be used as an analytic tool and be compared against the data I have collected, to see what broad themes can be evidenced in my own work.

## Chapter 7

### *“Who am I as a collaborative theatre-maker?”*

To me, the question of who I am as a collaborative theatre-maker is what lies at the heart of my quest to understand my collaborative theatre-making practice. In understanding who I am as a collaborator, I am able to delve into the inner workings of my own practice, to explore how my collaborative relationships have come to be, what underpins the relationships I have with my collaborators, what makes my collaborative practice work, and what I bring to the collaboration in terms of knowledge, attitude, and expertise.

As I have already said, in analysing the data for this Section, I used a process of both open and axial coding, to ‘crystallize’ (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) my response to the question of who I am as a collaborator. Once I had identified points of convergence between the theory and the data, I was able to generate the following mind map:

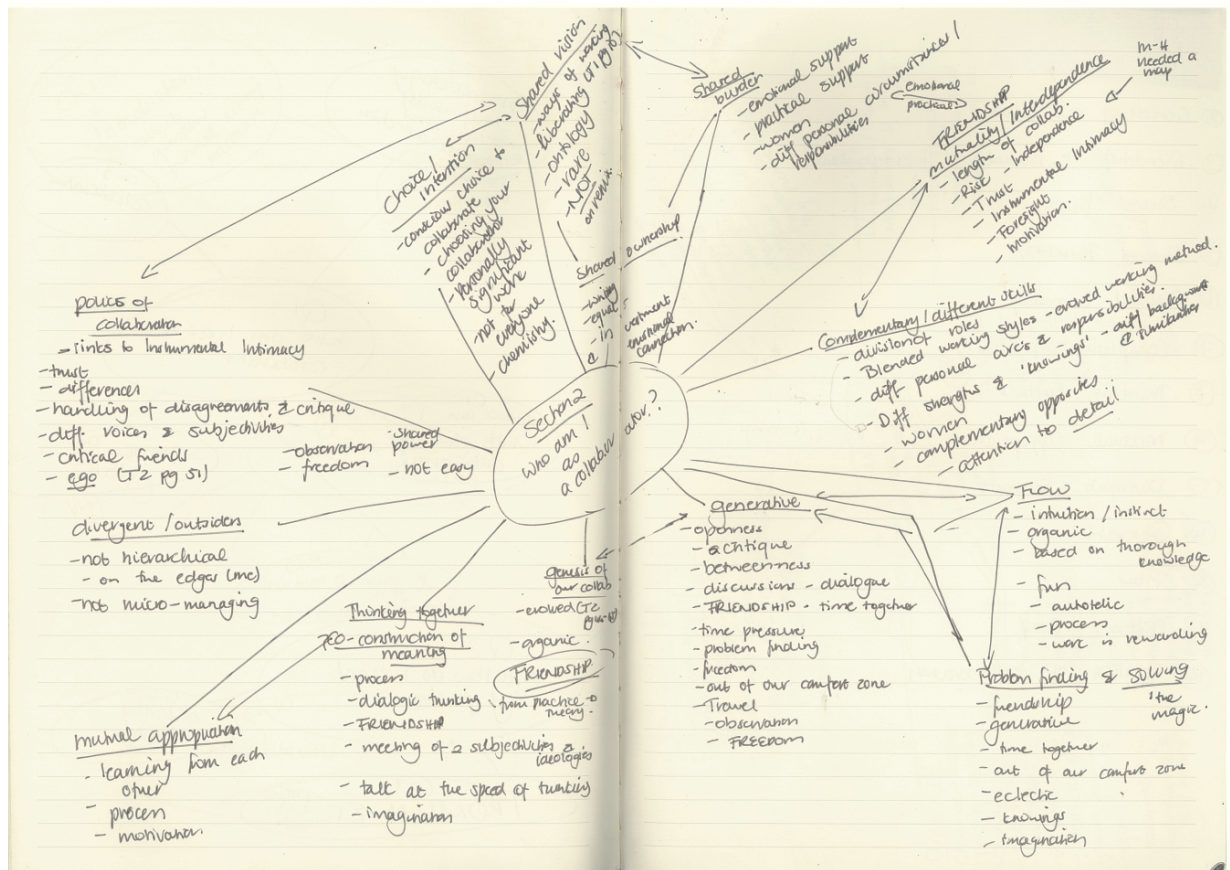


Figure 41: Visual map of the categories arising out of my coding of the data.

Thus, I was able to identify key categories that arose out of the data that would reveal more about myself and the way in which I collaborate: these included Choice/Intention; The genesis of our collaboration; Friendship – Mutuality and Interdependence; Shared Vision; Shared Burden; Shared Ownership; Complementary Skills; Thinking Together; Mutual Appropriation; The Politics of Collaboration; Divergence and Emergence; Generativity; Flow; and Problem Finding. In thinking about these categories, I began to see the ways in which they could be grouped thematically to reflect on different aspects of my role as a collaborative theatre-maker. Like all self-study research, this is an iterative process, so that in seeking to find answers to my critical question, the themes that I had identified threw up five sub-questions which could be used to answer the rather broad question of “Who am I as a collaborative theatre-maker?”. In grouping the themes in this way, the following five sub-questions evolved organically as I wrestled with the ideas represented above:

- How did my collaborative theatre-making practice begin, and what is it based upon?
- How do shared vision, shared burden, and shared ownership play out in my collaborative theatre-making practice?
- What are the inner workings of my collaborative theatre-making practice?
- Where do the ideas come from in my collaborative theatre-making practice?
- What does the data teach me about myself as a collaborator?

These five sub-questions allowed me to break my rather broad critical question down into manageable bites, as well as allowing me to arrange the information in a clearer and more easily understood manner. This chapter will address the first four of these these five sub-sections, while the last of these will be dealt with on its own in Chapter 8, as I seek to answer my critical question. In each of these sections, I will be grappling with the ways in which the data and the theoretical understandings generated in Chapter 5 and 6 intersect and overlap, to help me to understand myself as a collaborator, and answer my critical question. One important thing to note is that the majority of the data generated reflected upon my primary collaborative relationship, with Tamar. While Marié-Heleen has collaborated with us, and she certainly did discuss this with me, her observations of my collaboration with Tamar were extremely helpful in understanding the nature of our work together. In the same way, my discussions with the student participants also cast much light on the ways in which Tamar and I work together, as well as allowing me some insights into our working with them as collaborators<sup>59</sup>. For this reason, most of the discussion that follows here is centred around this primary collaborative relationship. Where possible, I have expanded the discussion to include the ways in which I work with both Marié-Heleen and the student participants.

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<sup>59</sup> The ways in which we collaborated with students are discussed in greater detail in Sections 1 & 3 of this thesis.

1. *How did my collaborative theatre-making practice begin, and what is it based upon?*

*“We’re completely the same kind of lunatic.”*

As I have explained in the Introduction to this thesis, my collaborative relationship with Tamar evolved alongside our growing friendship in the period 2004 – 2006. As colleagues, we shared many hours and many cups of tea and glasses of wine, talking and laughing together, working alongside each other, and gradually developing a working partnership that has endured for almost 15 years. At the basis of this partnership, and the most important factor underlying its longevity, is our **friendship**<sup>60</sup>. This is in line with what we have seen in the previous chapter, in the discussion around creative collaboration. Like most creative collaborations, ours evolved at first out of a **casual relationship**, and as the collaboration grew, so did our sense of commitment to each other. As we learned to work together, so we began to share other aspects of our lives with each other, in an increasing sense of intimacy and trust. Our collaboration thus began organically, and evolved instinctively over the progress of our many projects together. Tamar and I discussed this ‘casual’ beginning to our collaborative work:

*TAMAR: In the beginning, I remember the first time I spoke to you about collaborating on something was when you came to do the TIE project with the Macbeth, and we were sitting in my flat, and we were talking...*

*TANYA: Yes, I remember that conversation as well.*

*TAMAR: And it was like an informal discussion... And then I remember talking about that TIE project, and thinking this is interesting, she gets me, and we were*

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<sup>60</sup> In order to help the reader to connect the ideas presented in this chapter with the characteristics discussed in the first two chapters of this section, I have highlighted these characteristics in bold font, as I discuss them in relation to my own collaborative theatre-making practice.



*talking about...*

*TANYA: We're completely the same kind of lunatic.*

*TAMAR: Yes, we were talking about how to make Macbeth accessible and what would we do with it, and how would we make it work with these kids .... But I mean we didn't sit down to discuss this is what we're going to do. It was very kind of informal... in terms of the actual collaboration, we never sat down and went okay, now we are going to have a collaboration. It just kind of happened.*

This casual and organic beginning to our collaboration has continued to set the tone for our work together. Neither Tamar nor I see any need to create very formal structures or procedures for our collaborative work; rather, we tend to work in an organic and visceral way, making what Tamar calls “*a heart connection and a head connection*” to our work, and to the students we work with.

In the very early stages of my PhD journey, some of the supervisors at the PhD Cohort meetings offered by the School of Education cautioned me against trying to examine a practice that was so tied up in my social relationship with Tamar. They warned that I would need to separate the nature of our friendship from the study, so that I could look at our collaboration without our friendship ‘clouding’ my perceptions. One supervisor even seemed to feel that the fact that Tamar and I are such good friends would stand in the way of my study, and make it impossible to answer my questions. They felt that our friendship might, in fact, get in the way of our work, that it might be more of a hindrance than a help in our collaboration. This observation bothered me; while I felt instinctively that this was not the case, I worried that the data may in fact show that this was true, and I was concerned with how this would affect not only my study, but also our collaboration. However, in assessing the responses given by all of my participants, it has become increasingly clear that the fact that Tamar and I are such good friends is in fact the reason why our collaboration works; our **personal relationship** sets the tone for the work we do together, and makes that work possible, as Nhlakanipho pointed out, in our discussion about the *FrontLines* Project:

*I think you wouldn't have done a piece like that together if you weren't friends. I don't think you would have. There's a lot of emotion that you guys placed in*

*there and there was a lot of tears...that you guys dropped during the rehearsal. And I don't think you would have, I don't think you would have allowed yourself to reach that depth of emotion with anyone else.*

It has become clear to me that this sense of closeness and trust in each other lies at the heart of our collaborative relationship; without our friendship, the collaborative work could not and would not happen.

Marié-Heleen also pointed to the importance of friendship in our collaboration with her. While she was interested in working on the *FrontLines* Project because of the production itself, for her, much of her motivation lay in our relationship, as she explained *"I liked it very much because part of the project was because I could work with my friends, as a matter of fact. I could see you in a different mode; I loved that."* Thus, our friendships have become the basis of our working method, as we engaged in *"playing with other people"*, to use Marié-Heleen's phrase. The sense of knowing each other well, and working with and off each other's strengths and weaknesses demands a level of intimacy and trust that I think is only possible if you have a basis of some kind of caring relationship to work from.

Despite the very informal beginning of our collaborative work, it is clear that our continued collaboration is a **deliberate choice** (Colin & Sachsenmaier, 2016, p. 6). As we saw in Chapter 5, this is an important aspect of collaboration, and points to the necessity for collaborators to make a conscious decision to work *with* each other, rather than *alongside* each other. In my RSI, I spoke at some length about my own choice to collaborate:

*I like to work with other people. I think I am more creative that way. Because I think working with other people sparks off more ideas. I think I have more ideas when I am working with other people, rather than just sitting there being 'the one who knows', because I hate actually being 'the one who knows', because I don't know. So I think working collaboratively...again it is intuitive, it works better for me and I can be more creative and I can come up with more ideas in that sort of collaborative space.*

To me, the space created by my collaborative relationship is one of enhanced thinking and creativity, in which I feel greater degree of freedom. Partly, I think this is because ‘two heads are better than one’; in working collaboratively, I am not alone in a position of authority. This stepping out of a position of absolute authority, and out of being what Dorothy Heathcote calls “the one who knows” (Wagner, 1999) is a very important aspect of our collaborative relationship; neither of us is ‘in charge’. Rather, our collaborative practice is negotiated between ourselves and the students that we work with, a conscious choice that we enact over and over again at every stage of each project we undertake.

For both Tamar and I, another aspect of *choosing* to collaborate is also tied up with the kind of work that we want to do. The kind of projects we take on are also consciously chosen, and are, as Tamar puts it “...*projects which really mean something to me. They become personal.*” This sense of collaboration as a conscious choice also extends to the choice of who to collaborate with. Tamar and I discussed at length a number of cases where we have tried to work collaboratively with other directors, and it has simply not worked<sup>61</sup>. For both of us, the nature of our collaborative relationship is important, and rare:

*TAMAR: And that also keys into who you want to collaborate with because I think what I have learned is that actually you can't collaborate with just anyone. You have to speak the same language. I don't mean literally the same language. I think you have to see the world in a certain way and you have to believe the same things. I don't mean you have to be the same religion or that sort of [thing], but you have to believe fundamentally in the same kind of view of the world. Like a sense of an engagement with the world that you can empathise with and that you can, you don't have to agree on every little single element of it but there has to, I suppose what the Italians would call 'simpatico'.*

*TANYA: Yes, exactly.*

*TAMAR: That sense of we speak the same language and we can belong in the*

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<sup>61</sup> Of course, this does not include our collaborative work with Marié-Heleen.

*same space.*

*TANYA: I remember years ago, I think we were in Germany when we went to that conference and [a colleague] saying to me, it's a very rare thing, what you've got. She said it's not often that you find that thing where you can, and she said exactly that; when you find somebody who speaks your language. And she said, it's a hard thing to work like this all the time but it is also a very rare thing... you're very lucky. You're very lucky because a lot of people will never find that, and some people will find it once and never again in their lives; it's not something that happens a lot.*

Almost all of my respondents seemed to agree that the type of collaborative relationship that Tamar and I have with each other, and with our students, is not always possible; it requires the right kind of 'chemistry', and, as Brandon observed *"I think it's not for everyone. It is quite ...it's a different process. Some people enjoy it, some people won't"*. Marié-Heleen also spoke at length about the ways in which she has consciously and deliberately chosen to work collaboratively with certain friends and colleagues. She recounted to me that, like Tamar and I, she has been warned in the past by colleagues *not* to work collaboratively, as it might give the impression that she is unable to create theatrical and academic work on her own. She went on, however, to explain why she continues to choose to collaborate with Tamar and I, and with others:

*There's a very selfish drive for me in the collaboration. I feel I get something out of it in that it's at the same time creative, intellectual, and social. And that you offer me, because not everybody does that.*

Certainly Tamar and I have always been aware that our methods and ways of working are better suited to some colleagues and students than others; as we have already seen, working alongside someone is not the same as true collaboration, and this has certainly been the case with some of the students and colleagues we have worked with over the years.

As we have seen, and in line with Farrell's suggestion, as our collaboration has developed and our friendship has deepened, so has our sense of **mutuality and interdependence** (John-Steiner, 2000; Farrell, 2001). Time and time again, my respondents talked about the ways in which Tamar and I are interwoven into each other's lives in a myriad of ways. This even extends to the ways in which students seem to see us as one entity; Lauren reminded me that students often refer to us as "*The Twins*". This sense of us being 'one person' also extends to our colleagues; there have been some members of our research group who have called each of us by the other's name for years. Partly, I think this is because of the similarity of our names, but it also points to a very important part of our collaborative relationship, which is the quality of **mutuality**.

Of course, as we have seen earlier in Chapter 1, this sense of the blurring of lines between our individual identities can be dangerous; there is a real **risk** that we may in fact come to see ourselves as a single entity. However, I feel that Tamar and I are fairly well aware of this problem, and try as far as possible to guard against it. We both demonstrate a clear understanding that while others might think we are the same, we are not:

*TAMAR: Because when you have a collaborative relationship that works really well, sometimes your other kinds of projects don't seem to measure up. And I think maybe there is something in that, which I think is maybe a problem, in the sense that if you become so locked in that collaboration that you feel like you can't function outside of it.*

*TANYA: Yes, I think that's unhealthy.*

*TAMAR: Yes, it's not healthy. But I don't think that is our situation ...*

Part of this guarding against the pitfalls of too much mutuality lies in the ways in which we each protect our privacy and our personal time away from our work; while it is clear that we both do this, we do so in quite different ways and to different degrees, partly because our

personal circumstances are different<sup>62</sup>.

To us, however, this sense of mutuality and interdependence is pivotal in our collaboration. In our case, it is based largely on a sense of admiration for each other's talents and intellect:

TAMAR: *I actually, joking aside, I think you have to think your collaborator is brilliant...Maybe brilliant is the wrong word, but I think you have to see in the person something of profound value and I don't just mean in their work. I think you have to see in the person something of profound value, because otherwise...*

TANYA: *Why would work with them?*

We see value in each other both as people, and as creators of theatre. We have called this relationship both synergistic and symbiotic; as Tamar observes "*I think synergy operates because you are not identical but you...You fill the gaps with the other partner.*" This sense of a symbiotic relationship is reflected in the ways in which we work together. Almost all of my respondents talked about the ways in which Tamar and I are, as Devaksha put it, "*in sync with each other*".

Marié-Heleen talked about the difficulty of being the 'third wheel', coming into this collaborative relationship. For her, the difficulty lay in learning how to read and negotiate the nuances of the mutuality and interdependence that is such an important part of the way in which Tamar and I work together.

MARIÉ-HELEEN: *I had to step into an already established kind of process,*

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<sup>62</sup> Tamar is single and has no children, but bears a large amount of responsibility in caring for her elderly mother. I am married with two small children, and a husband who works away from home for long periods of time. These different home lives and responsibilities determine to a large extent the ways in which we can engage in our work.

*something that was there, even though we made something new... I had to try and find a way into the process. You guys have got an understanding, because you work together so often. An unspoken understanding, you can follow each other's tracks and everything. I had to find a way of getting in...*

TANYA: *So for you, you needed a roadmap?*

This sense of needing a 'roadmap' to the mutuality that Tamar and I share is important; for an outsider to the core collaborative relationship, our closeness could have been alienating. What may have saved the situation in Marié-Heleen's case is probably her close friendships with both Tamar and I, and the fact that she is herself part of a close collaborative partnership with another colleague, which allowed her some insight into the nature of the relationship.

In our collaborative relationship, so much of what we do, we do together, and the ways in which we rely on each other and help each other are evident to outside observers. This interdependence has led us to develop a high level of what Farrell calls '**instrumental intimacy**' (2001, p. 151); we trust each other implicitly, and we use this trust as a way of managing the **risks** of creating new work, as I observed when I spoke with Tamar about this:

*I think you're less likely to take those kinds of risks when it's you on your own as a director. Whereas when there's two of you it's like well, if we try this and it doesn't work, between us we'll come up with something else.*

Our sense of trusting each other has become the basis for a very long-standing collaborative relationship. If we remember that most theorists consider the average length of a collaboration to be about 10 years<sup>63</sup>, then the fact that Tamar and I have been collaborating since about 2004 is noteworthy. Partly, I think that the length of our collaboration has a lot to do with our friendship, which has endured, but also it has to do with the fact the we both see the length of our collaboration as one of its great strengths. Tamar highlighted the

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<sup>63</sup> See Chapter 6.

importance of the length of our collaboration to the kind of work we are able to do, commenting:

*I think good collaboration happens **because** you work with one person over a period of time. In fact, I think the longer you work with the person, the deeper the journey becomes and the more profound the experience becomes, because you start to be able to just make more complex ideas evolve. Maybe you know each other better.*

The length of our collaborative relationship has allowed us to deepen not only the relationship itself, but also to expand the type and complexity of the work that we do. Without our implicit trust and knowledge of each other, created through our many years of working together, we would not be able to explore the themes of our work in such detail and depth. Because we know each other so well, and because we have worked together so long, we have a well-developed ‘shorthand’ that allows us to grapple with more and more challenging and complex ideas in our work. This sense of ‘knowing each other better’ and trusting each other, also allows us to motivate each other and spur each other on to achieve, while also allowing us to predict each other’s moods and thoughts. This is the quality that can be called Foresight, and Tamar and I demonstrate again and again our ability to foresee what the other will think of feel about something:

TAMAR: *Sometimes I’ll just raise my eyebrows and go oh my God, and you’ll go okay, I’ll fix it.*

TANYA: *And vice versa.*

This common ‘shorthand’ allows us to work closely together and off each other. Our ability to predict each other’s thoughts, to foresee what each will think or do, allows us to work together sometimes without even articulating what we think into words. This kind of ‘mind-reading’ is not supernatural; rather, it is based on years of experience, of knowing each other, and on a deep emotional and intellectual connection that results from our friendship.

To sum up, then, it is possible to create the following broad description of the origins and basis of our collaborative relationship:



*My collaborative relationship with Tamar is based on our deep and lasting friendship. While this collaborative relationship began casually, and organically, we have made a conscious and deliberate choice to collaborate with each other. We are aware that the type of collaborative relationship we have is rare, and that it is not possible to work in this way with everybody. Our choice to collaborate also includes the type of projects that we will take on, and we are increasingly drawn to projects that are personally significant to us. Our collaborative relationship demonstrates a high level of interdependence and mutuality, and is based on trust. We work in a way that is synergistic and symbiotic, and others see us as being 'in sync' with each other. Our high level of trust in each other allows us to share the risk of creative work, while also allowing our collaborative relationship to have a very long life-span. This sense of trust also allows us to anticipate each other's ideas and feelings, as well as motivate each other at all times in our work.*

2. *How do shared vision, shared burden, and shared ownership play out in my collaborative theatre-making practice?*

*"Sometimes you need another person to be your kind of cheerleader"*

One of the most important themes to emerge out of the data I have gathered, is the importance of **shared vision** (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; John-Steiner, 2000; Farrell, 2001). Time and time again, both students and my collaborative partners highlighted the importance of a sense of a shared goal and **intention** for the work that we make.

One one level, this is meta-structural; overarching all of our work together is a sense of a common understanding of theatre. As I observe in my RSI, *"I think maybe that's why it has always been easy to work with you [Tamar] or Marié-Heleen is that we do share a sense of*

*what we think theatre is for. We share a sense of how we think it should work.”* This sense of a shared view of theatre and its importance is the basis upon which our collaboration works. To my mind, without this, there can be no collaboration. In my RSI, I explained that my ideal collaborator is

*Somebody who thinks the way I think, but not exactly the same way. But somebody who sees the world in a similar way. Who sees theatre in a similar way and who talks the same language, metaphorically speaks the same language as me... Who just gets why I am doing theatre and what I am doing it for in the same way.*

Without a shared ontological understanding of the theatre, it would be impossible to work together in the way that we do. Thus, our shared ontological position in relation to the theatre as an art form serves as a meta-structural **intention** (Colin & Sachsenmaier, 2016, pp. 12-13) that underpins everything that we do.

On another level, the sense of **shared vision** is important in terms of each project. In the case of the *FrontLines* Project, we have already seen the ways in which this shared vision arose and was developed through the devising process. Interestingly, all the students I interviewed talked at length about the importance for them of the coherence of our shared vision. Lauren probably put it best when she said *“It was like you two knew what the other was thinking, and so it was never like we felt we were caught in the middle of two divorced parents.”* For all the students, the fact that Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I were ‘on the same page’, so to speak, was extremely reassuring. Because they felt that we knew where we wanted to go, they were more open to trusting the devising process, that they might have been if we had seemed more uncertain about the vision for the piece.

What was very interesting in analysing the data, is that when I looked at this particular theme, many of the students used *FrontLines: The Remix* as an example of what happens when there is **no** shared vision. Many of the students commented on the fact that they felt that there was a disjuncture between what Tamar and I had intended for the production,

and what the other three directors had envisioned. This lack of a coherent vision played out for the students as a lack of direction; as Brandon put it *“Nobody had one idea that we were going to follow. It was there, there, there...everything just happened everywhere.”* While it has always been clear to Tamar and I that we wanted very different things from the other directors on that particular iteration of the *FrontLines* Project, the students’ insights finally allowed me, after many years, to fully understand why I had felt so disconnected from the process. Without a sense of shared intention and vision, there was simply no basis for the collaboration, and that is why it did not work.

For Tamar and I, our sense of shared vision is clear. We understand it as something that arises out of the **‘betweenness’** (Murray, 2016, p. 36) of our collaborative relationship. Tamar explains that:

*There are two artistic visions that are merging to make one, which is bigger than the sum of the parts. Which is why it’s exciting. Because individually you’d make two different projects, which might both be good, but actually, when you put the two things together I think it becomes richer.*

She goes on to describe this sense of a shared vision as *“liberating”*. What I think she means is that in many ways, the sense of co-constructing a vision frees you from the burden and the terror of being solely responsible for absolutely everything about the production from start to finish.

This leads quite neatly on to the next aspect of ‘sharing’ in collaborative work. A big part of collaborating is about having a **shared burden**. As we saw in Chapter 6, interdependence on a collaborator can allow one to share physical, emotional, practical and financial burdens, in the pursuit of shared ideals. While Tamar, Marié-Heleen and I do not often share financial burdens, the data clearly revealed that all three of us feel that we share the physical, practical and emotional burdens involved in creating a theatrical work.

In terms of the physical and practical burdens, all three of us lead busy, pressured lives. Both Tamar and Marié-Heleen have full-time jobs, and carry a large amount of responsibility within those jobs. My own life is very taken up with the raising of my two young sons. My husband is also away from home for long periods of time, due to his own professional commitments, leaving me as a single parent for up to 6 months of the year. This means that none of us are able to only focus our energies on the theatrical work. Rather, we are all multi-tasking almost all of the time, and part of what makes that possible is that we support each other. Tamar and I discussed this part of our relationship;

*TAMAR: I often feel like we juggle lots of balls, and of necessity really. Because we don't have the luxury of saying well I'm only going to be doing this one thing for this amount of time because you know, it's our art. We just don't live in that world.*

*TANYA: I also think, to add to that, I think the reality in both our lives is that we have people who depend on us. I have small children. Your mom depends on you. We have other responsibilities and I think part of the value of our collaboration is that it allows a space that goes... you need to go and do something else now, I can carry on with this work, you go and feed your kids, or you go check on your mom, or you go and get your mom to hospital or a doctor or whatever.*

It is very much a part of our working method that we often 'divide and conquer'. While one person is busy fulfilling their everyday responsibilities, the others may well be working on tasks that have to do with the project itself. Marié-Heleen spoke of this when she said "*I think what we tried to do was to accommodate what the other person had to do*". To me, this sense of mutual support and accommodation is partly a result of our friendship, but also because we are all women. As we have seen in Chapter 6, part of the difference between the ways that men and women collaborate have to do with women's roles as "maintaining the social fabric" and their responsibility "for private life, especially childcare" (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 122). Thus, in our case, our own roles as caregiver, partner, mother, worker, among others, affects the way in which we work together. Our mutual support of each other feels very **gendered** to me; because we are women, we have greater insight into each other's lives and responsibilities, and so we are able to offer each other greater

support.

This sense of spreading the practical and physical load also extends to the actual workload of the project itself. The reality is that mounting a production on the scale of the *FrontLines* Project is a massive undertaking, and certainly the fact that there was more than one director was an important part of its success. As Devaksha observes *“I think for a project of this magnitude, it is important to have two [directors], because the workload is immense...”*. For Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I, a large part of sharing this burden was to recognise that we have different skills sets, and to use these differences strategically. As Tamar pointed out *“I think that’s an important thing about collaboration is that you don’t both have to do everything.”* With this understanding, we are able to assign to each other tasks and roles within the broader project of the theatrical work, that draw on our different talents and abilities.

Probably the most important part of the sense of shared burden lies in the **emotional support** we are able to offer each other. Making a piece of theatre is hard work; it demands long hours, is highly stressful, and can bring one to the point of burn-out. Tamar talked about the loneliness of being a solo director, and how working collaboratively alleviates some of that loneliness:

*Yes, it is quite a lonely thing to be a director, I think. I think in some ways it’s a very lonely place to be, because also the buck stops with you. So it’s really nice to be able to have somebody share that burden, and also to be the person who can go no, you aren’t talking complete garbage, or yes, it does make sense, or no, actually it is working and it does look good. Sometimes you need another person to be your kind of cheerleader, I think.*

This sense of being a ‘cheerleader’ for each other is a very important part of our relationship, and is based on our friendship. Because we are friends, we have an emotional connection that allows us to both support and take care of each other, especially at our lowest moments. In discussing a particularly low moment that I had experienced during one

of our other projects, where my sense of burn-out was acute and overwhelming, Tamar observed that *“that is the test of a collaborative relationship, is whether you can weather those kinds of storms”*. To me, this sums up the type of emotional support we have provided for each other over the years, and possibly why our collaboration has lasted so long; because we can support each other, and share the burden both practically and emotionally, we have managed to keep working together for far longer than many people might have expected.

This sense of shared burden is part and parcel of the **interdependence** of our relationship, as is the sense of trust that we share. As we have seen in Chapter 6, this kind of *“cognitively and emotionally”* [her emphasis] (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 124) charged relationship between collaborators creates a sense of **equal ownership** of both the process and the product of the creative collaboration. Tamar and I agree that we are both happy for the other to ‘speak’ for our work together; this is because we have no sense that each of us ‘owns’ specific parts of the work that we do:

TAMAR: *‘By the time we have finished a project we don’t know from whom the ideas came’. Yes. I think sometimes there might be specific, like in **FrontLines** there’s specific moments that we know was like an idea that was yours and...*

TANYA: *This came from this. This came from that.*

TAMAR: *But the actual playing out of it, how it turns out in the end product is so synced.*

TANYA: *And interwoven.*

TAMAR: *Yes. So you can say, well this was my idea in the first place but actually what I imagined when I thought of the idea, and how it looks when it actually ends up...*

TANYA: *Yes, is two completely different things.*

Through the devising process, each idea or moment that we bring to the work is transformed, melded together with all the other moments brought by ourselves and the

students we work with, so that we no longer can identify ‘mine’ and ‘yours’ in the final performance.

This sense of shared ownership is also reflected in the academic papers that Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I write together. The process of this writing seems to fascinate outsiders; we are often asked to explain ‘who does what?’ or ‘who writes which section?’. The truth is, that like most of our work, the papers we write evolve organically between us. Tamar discussed this as aspect of our shared ownership, saying:

*Nobody understands that actually it's not somebody who writes one bit and somebody else writes another bit. Actually it's written together. It's a joint ownership.*

This is borne out by the fact that often when I look back at our productions, or our papers, I am completely unable to distinguish what may have been Tamar’s idea, and what may have been mine. I think that this seamless melding of our ideas is part of the success of our work, and allows us to speak with a shared ‘voice’ through our work.

The shared ownership of the *FrontLines* Project also extends to the students that we worked with. Every single one of the students I interviewed agreed that they had a strong sense of ownership of the project. As Lauren so aptly put it, “*we put literally heart, soul, blood, sweat, tears, everything into that process*”. Nhlakanipho echoed this when he remarked that “*I’ve given so much of my life to make this production work*”. Even Devaksha, who had largely been involved in the project as a Stage Manager, observed that “*You actually become as attached to the project [as the performers did], as the crew... there were pieces I loved, and it feels like your baby*”. By contrast, many of the students spoke about the fact that they felt the opposite in the case of *FrontLines: The Remix*. Many of them commented that they had felt that something they ‘owned’ and were a part of (the original *FrontLines* Project) had been profoundly disrespected by the directors of *The Remix*, because they had never actually seen or read the original work. Lauren expressed the students’ sense of hurt and rage best when she said “*that broke us when we found out*”. It is

clear that those who had been a part of our original *FrontLines* cast and crew felt that the *Remix* process took something away from them, and was a betrayal of the work that they felt they had made. The importance of this sense of deep commitment and ownership that the students articulated is something that we will come back to in Section 3 of this thesis.

In discussing the ways that shared vision, shared burden and shared ownership all play out in my collaborative theatre-making practice, it is possible therefore to come to the following conclusions:

***My collaborative theatre-making practice is based on a strong sense of shared vision. A shared ontological position with regards to theatre and its value forms the meta-structural intention that underpins the work that we do. In each of our projects, we engage with a shared and coherent vision of what we think the project will be. This shared vision emerges out of the 'betweenness' of our collaborative relationship. In sharing a vision for the work, we also share the practical, physical and emotional burdens of the work, in ways that seem particularly gendered. Working together helps us to stave off the loneliness that can be implicit in the director's role, and we are able to act as 'cheerleaders' for each other. Because this is a function of our interdependence, we are also able to have a sense of shared ownership of both the process and the product of our work. This sense of shared ownership extends to our written academic work, and also encompasses the students that we work with, who feel an equal sense of ownership of the work we have done with them.***

### ***3. What are the inner workings of my collaborative theatre-making practice?***

*"it's circuitous and it's inventive, and it's creative, and it's sort of a little bit off the wall"*



One of the factors that originally drove me to begin this study was that I wanted to gain a better understanding of how my collaborative theatre-making practice actually worked. I wanted to look under the skin of my practice, so to speak, to observe and understand the anatomy of our working together. While the whole of this study encompasses this attempt, it was in looking at the basic ‘physiology’ (to extend the metaphor) of our working styles, our skill sets, our ways of thinking, and the ways in which we learn and borrow from each other, and the politics of our collaboration, that I was really able to start to unpack a practice that in reality often feels entirely seamless and instinctive.

The first aspect of this is the similarity in our backgrounds and training. Tamar, Marié-Heleen and I are all white, middle-class South African women, of similar age. While there are differences in our backgrounds, in the main our life experience is similarly one of a fairly sheltered and privileged upbringing, which emphasised education and liberal-humanist values<sup>64</sup>. As far as our training goes, we were all students at traditional, research-based, formerly ‘White’ universities. In the case of Tamar and I, we were students in the same department, although some years apart, and in a few cases we had the same teachers. The philosophy and the world view that underpinned our training in theatre was therefore very much the same. Marié-Heleen’s educational background was slightly different, with her spending her undergraduate years at a traditionally Afrikaans-medium university. Nevertheless, all of us were the recipients of a very Western, some might even say Colonial, education in our field. Our **“professional socialisation”** (Sawyer R. K., 2003c, p. loc 3806 of 5563), was, therefore, very much the same, and the similarity of our backgrounds and training has provided a congruent basic understanding of our art form, and of the world, as we have seen in the discussion of the **intention** behind our work.

Of course, for all of us, post-graduate study, work experience, and the changing realities

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<sup>64</sup> It lies beyond the scope of this thesis to really unpack and interrogate our subjectivity as a result of this background, but I mention it here because I think it is part of the reason for the shared ontological position of our work.

of the country we live in and the institutions we work in, have continually challenged our early learning. I certainly feel that my practice is, in many respects, light-years away from that initial training. In many ways, our collaborative theatre-making practice can be seen to be **divergent**, working against our shared **socialisation into our discipline** (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 119). Despite the fact that theatre is always collaborative, the idea that one can work with two or more directors, who co-construct a shared vision and co-create and co-direct the resulting piece of theatre, seems to fall well outside the mainstream among our peers and colleagues. My own experience has certainly borne this out; my collaborative work with Tamar has been questioned and critiqued by colleagues. One colleague in particular memorably observed that she could ‘never work like that, as I need to have complete artistic control and a singular artistic vision’. Certainly in our respective Universities, the idea of bringing students together across the different campuses was met with some disbelief, and very little support in terms of the logistical and administrative challenges such a project engenders.

Part of this resistance to our mode of working has, I think, to do with the fact that we are working against the traditional hierarchy of the theatre, which places the single director at the helm of the production. While we would never say that our work is completely democratic – it is not, as we always have the final say in the production – it does seem to confuse and challenge many of the notions some people have about the role of the director. As I remarked to Tamar, *“I think that people are intrigued by the way that we work together, and I think that they can’t quite work it out.... How does it work?”*. Certainly, our experience at many conferences when we have spoken about our work has been that instead of being asked questions afterwards about the work itself, we are more often asked about the mechanics of our collaborative process, and about ‘who does what?’. The same can be said of our writing process, and we have been asked very similar sorts of questions when discussing our academic work in various forums.

Tamar and I also tend to view ourselves as **divergent**, and **not ‘on the fast track’** (Bennis & Biederman, 1997; Farrell, 2001) by any means. In my case, because I have drifted around in theatre and academia to a certain degree, and am now largely an independent scholar, I “float around the edges of things”, as I put it in my interview with Tamar. I see myself as being **on the periphery** both of academia, and of the theatre world in Durban. Tamar, by contrast, is probably much more visible in both these areas, but also sees herself largely as an **outsider to the centre** in both. This is not as true of Marié-Heleen, who is far more well-known and ‘in the centre’ than either Tamar or I. Nevertheless, however, she is also a member of a long-standing collaborative creative partnership with another colleague, and often works **on the margins** in terms of her methods and approaches. This sense that all of us are working with **like-minded rebels** within our field allows us to create “a space for work that is slightly off the mean”, as Tamar describes it.

Despite our similar **socialisation into our discipline**, we have very different, and in some ways, discrete skills. Tamar’s training as an actor, dancer, and singer, her musical knowledge, and her many years of directing experience have given her a particular skills set. On the other hand, my own background as a Stage Manager, my knowledge of the technical aspects of theatre, and my strong background in Drama in Education have given me a very different skill set. Marié-Heleen’s work as a choreographer, stage combat specialist, body-mind practitioner, and scholar of embodiment and whole-brain learning, has given her a range of skills that neither Tamar nor I have. Because of these different skills, we tend to work in quite different ways, and we have evolved different roles within our collaborative theatre-making practice; as I put it to Marié-Heleen “We were all wearing different hats, in a way”. Because we have different strengths, we are able to ‘divide and conquer’ (as we saw in the previous sub-question), by bringing our respective skills and ‘knowings’ to bear upon the work. Marié-Heleen and I discussed the different roles we play:

MARIÉ-HELEEN: For me, if I’m not touching people, I’m not talking to them. You see I’m always touching people.

TANYA: It’s really interesting, because if I had to characterise us, I would almost say you’re a toucher, Tamar is a show-er, she’s got to be on her feet doing.

MARIÉ-HELEEN: *She's a performer.*

TANYA: *And I'm a watcher<sup>65</sup>. For ages it bothered me, I used to think, why am I just sitting? But I've realised that it's actually not ... its just the way that I work.*

MARIÉ-HELEEN: *What you do there, you get the same things done that I do in pushing people around on the stage, and what Tamar does dancing up and down.*

Thus, our different sets of 'knowings' – Tamar's knowledge and experience as a performer, Marié-Heleen's knowledge as a choreographer, and my knowledge as a Stage Manager and director - are all brought to bear on achieving our common goals. As Tamar observes:

*I think partly what we do, is that we have very different skill sets.... I think that our strengths and weaknesses complement each other. So there is a sense that you are able to make the stuff that I can't do work, and vice versa. Not that we can't do it, but we are able to strengthen the places which need to be strengthened.*

Of course, this disparity in our knowledge and skills could, in certain circumstances, be problematic, if we did not have skill sets that are complementary. Kamini pointed to the importance of this aspect of our collaboration, saying "*I think collaborating with [other] directors works when they each come with a different focus, or different directing style that complements each other.*" This notion of how our skill sets and 'knowings' work together in a complementary way also allows us to recognise and make space for the **plurality of our voices** in the work. Because we are not all doing the same things, or looking at the work from the same perspective, we have the opportunity to each find our own way to make the work 'speak' for us.

One of the key ways that this plays out in our work is in our attention to detail. My

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<sup>65</sup> This notion of myself as a watcher will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 8.

interviews revealed a fascinating insight into the different ways that each of us deals with the finer details of our work, and this in turn reveals a lot about what we each bring to the collaborative theatre-making process. While we all agreed that we are detail-focussed in our work, it is clear that the types of details that each of us sees and pays attention to is different. Tamar is often very focussed on the visual details of the work, and will nit-pick about the placement of a piece of scenery to a degree that I would never do. Marié-Heleen tends to be very focussed on the details that have to do with what she terms *“the body in space”*. I, on the other hand am concerned with the technical and practical details of the production, as well as focussing on *“how you say a line, and how you stress it, and are you saying the words correctly”*, as I put it in my RSI. This focus on how the piece *sounds* is an important part of my process. We all talked about the fact that for each of us, we often haven’t even seen the tiny detail that our collaborator(s) are concerned with. Tamar described this aspect of our collaborative work, saying *“And we check each other. So you’ll see if I’m missing something and vice versa, which is important, because you do miss [things,] you inevitably miss”*. By making use of all our different ways of seeing the work, we are able, I think, to create far more nuanced and finely wrought work, through this layered approach to detail. As Tamar put it,

*I think the work is more interrogated because inevitably when you work with someone you are forced to challenge your own ideas because you can’t keep going in the same circle all the time.*

Despite the differences in our approaches, though, it is clear that we have managed to develop a fairly coherent style and mode of working. This coherent style, however, does not imply that our directorial approach, our work rhythms, or our work rate is exactly the same. We all retain our own personal styles, approaches and preferences. However, we have managed to blend our styles and approaches into a *“clearer sense of who does what”*, as I have put it. This is truer for Tamar and I, because our many years of working together have allowed us to fine-tune our process. When working with Marié-Heleen, there was definitely a sense that we all had to adjust, and find a new way of working together, as we settled into the project. However, this was achieved fairly quickly, and Marié-Heleen agreed that if the

three of us were to work together again, she would find the process much easier, having developed a better sense of our working style.

The reasons why we have been able to develop this coherent working style, and also why we are able to work towards our **shared vision**, even when we are fulfilling different roles within the theatre-making process, lie in the depth of our **shared thinking**. For Tamar and I in particular, this sense of what I have called “*thinking together*” is absolutely fundamental to our collaborative work. The basis for this **shared thinking** lies once again in the roots of our friendship and our degree of **instrumental intimacy** (Farrell, 2001), and is based almost entirely on a dialogic mode of thinking. As Tamar explained:

*I think this is very critical for me, because I think this is also not just in the directing process, but in the academic process too, that the dialogue, the dialogic part for me is critical. It's not theoretical, it is dialogic. So we ask questions of each other, not in a kind of like academic way. But the questioning is also about discovering. So we're both discovering simultaneously. So it's an exchange of ideas that happens in a question and answer kind of way but it's not like one person has all the questions and the other person has all the answers. So it becomes a dialogic exchange.*

Through conversation, questioning, probing, we are able to **co-construct meaning** in an iterative and evolving process that Tamar and I have irreverently termed “*over-wine thinking*”. This points to the natural and unstructured nature of our **joint thinking** (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 3), as so much of it happens outside of our working environment, over cups of tea, during casual lunches, in brainstorming sessions, or while travelling.

In our discussion, Tamar also pointed to the importance of “*Thinking things that are just off the wall...the lateral thinking that happens rather than the linear thinking*”. Our ability to ‘think outside of the box’ seems to be enhanced by the dialogic nature of our thinking process, which often does not follow any kind of logic. As Tamar observed:

*It doesn't come from a linear or a logical or a carefully thought out ... it's circuitous and it's inventive, and it's creative, and it's sort of a little bit off the wall, but it takes us somewhere in a discursive way.*

This should not, of course, be seen to imply that we agree about everything. The discursive and dialogic space of our shared thinking is also a highly contested space. While we often disagree, Tamar was clear that for her this contestation is an important part of our thinking process:

*I think the argument happens around, and I don't even think it's argument, I think it's dialogue. I think it's about what we are making and the aesthetics around it and the philosophy around it, the ideology around it, the meaning that we want to create, the actual important stuff.*

Thus, this process of dialogue, of argument, of wrestling with each other's ideas, allows us to **co-construct the meanings** imbedded in our work. To my mind, the process of directing any play is a process of co-construction of meaning, as director and actors work with the text and negotiate what it means to them, as they find ways to bring the words on the page to life on the stage. In a collaborative theatre-making process such as the *FrontLines* Project, meanings emerge out of and are constructed by our dialogic thinking, and are a result of the entanglement of our respective subjective thought processes. Tamar summed this up very eloquently:

*Even if you're on the same page and you agree with the people most of the time, you still are going to see the world differently, because we are all individuals. So we bring our own individual subjectivity to it. But then, there's a third place that engages both those positions, but offers a new space, which I think is richer.*

The result of our thinking in the 'third place' is that we tend to be, as Marié-Heleen put it "*in each other's headspaces, and you understand each other's ideas so well*". This sense of a shared 'headspace' also allows us to, as Tamar put it "*think fast together*"; because of the ways in which our thinking processes mesh and work off each other, we are able, often, to think together almost at the speed of speaking, or faster, as we anticipate what the other is

about to say. In this ‘third place’ we are able to engage with what John-Steiner calls “**connected knowing**” (2000, p. 101 & 200) and use our ideas and our knowledge bases to **co-construct** the meaning of our work. These meanings are then further expanded upon and developed as we work with the students in process of “**collective sensemaking**” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 193) from moment to moment in the performed theatre piece. Tamar and I commented in this in our interview:

*TAMAR: It’s all filtered through a dual consciousness and it’s made better. It’s made better through that dual consciousness...*

*TANYA: And it’s not only our consciousness, it’s through the students as well. So we come with ideas, but they also take those ideas and do things with them.*

*TAMAR: Yes, that’s what happens when you collaborate with a person, you get that dual consciousness. So now, you’re expanding it to a group and it exponentially gets bigger.*

This points to the construction of what John-Steiner calls a “**thought community**” (2000, p. 196). The sense that the students can take our ideas and “*do things with them*” is a vital part of the collaborative theatre-making process, as the students bring their own subjectivities to bear on the collaborative meaning-making of the devising process.

An important part of the construction of the this ‘**thought community**’, and the shared thinking implicit in this community, lies in what John-Steiner calls “**mutual appropriation**” (2000, p. 3). While much of this is about learning from each other (which will be discussed in far greater detail in Section 3 of this thesis), I also believe that it is about finding ways to articulate our different skills and ‘knowings’ together in ways that allow us to harness skills and knowledge that we don’t necessarily have. An example of this is somewhat characteristic of the way Tamar and I work together; Tamar often has ideas about what she would like the set or the lighting to look like. As a visual thinker, she often draws these ideas in rough sketches, but lacks the technical expertise to adequately communicate what she wants to the technical crew. My skills and technical knowledge come into play here, as I am able to ‘translate’ her drawing and ideas into what I call “*technical speak*”, and communicate them more clearly to our technical crew. Tamar and I laughingly discussed this



aspect of our collaboration, which is infamous amongst the crew that have worked with us over the years:

*TANYA: But often you draw things and then I'll look at it and we'll go okay, but that works with this and then I can go and translate it into technical speak for the people who can make that real.*

*TAMAR: Which is very useful. It's a very useful skill.*

*TANYA: I mean I just remember Luke looking at that set design that you did for **Blood Wedding** and looking at me going okay, can you please speak to me in a language that I understand. What did she mean? What is that?*

This implies that we are able to **share our expertise** through the use of our respective skills sets, in the service of co-creating the theatrical work. The sense that we can 'translate' each other's ideas also extends to our work with the students; as Tamar says "*Sometimes I can see that the students are not understanding what I'm saying, because sometimes I'm quite obscure, and it's quite nice to have an interpreter.*" Of course, this sense of being able to 'translate' for one another also depends on our high level of '**instrumental intimacy**' (Farrell, 2001), and our shared thinking. Because we know each other's mind so well, we are able to decode and decipher our most unformed thoughts and incoherent utterances for each other, for the crew, and for the students we work with.

Part of this process of **mutual appropriation** also influences our dialogic thinking, and the co-construction of meaning in our work. Tamar calls this a process of "*speaking back*" to each other, saying

*I think when you work collaboratively, it's helpful to have somebody speak back to you what they hear. So, I'll say something and then you will speak back to me what you heard me say. Then I'll go okay, no, I didn't mean what I said, or oh, actually yes, now that makes sense when you say it back to me. I did actually understand it, I just didn't know that I understood it. There is an interactive process that happens of speaking back, and that from the speaking back you learn something.*

In this process of ‘speaking back’, we are able to help the other to articulate what they know instinctively and implicitly, or what they are in the process of coming to know. Thus, we can help each other to grasp and articulate the **emergent** meanings and knowledges that lie within our collaborative work.

All of this is not to say that we are always in complete agreement with each other. As I have already said, we agree that our collaborative theatre-making practice is “*contested*”, and that even though we are working collaboratively, there are certainly strong differences in opinions. In talking at length about what could be called the “**politics of collaboration**” (Ruhsam, 2016, p. 83), Tamar and I addressed this aspect of our collaborative work:

*TAMAR: Even though we’re collaborating there are...*

*TANYA: There are differences.*

*TAMAR: So there’s compromise and often the compromises are better, but then within that work there are also the moments, which are significant and important and are there because they are significant to that individual. And I think it’s important to recognise those moments... I don’t think collaboration is easy. And I think some people think it is easy. I think that people think it’s...*

*TANYA: I think that they think it’s like, you do...*

*TAMAR: Half the work. They think it’s like you’re doing half the work, and actually...*

*TANYA: You’re not.*

*TAMAR: ... it’s double the work in a way. But it’s double the work...*

*TANYA: The nature of the work is different.*

*TAMAR: It might be double the work in some ways, but in other ways, the work is so much easier.*

*TANYA: Well it’s more pleasurable. I don’t think it’s easier. Because I think you have to think very very hard.*

*TAMAR: I think it’s made easier because of the positives that emerge from it. I mean I think there’s a danger of going oh yes, everything is lovely, and obviously there are problems sometimes and it’s not like we have like this perfect...*

*TANYA: No, because we frustrate each other.*

*TAMAR: Yeah, we're frustrating sometimes. But I think what we realise, or certainly, what I realise is that the value, the benefit of it so far outweighs the negatives, that you put up with those frustrations.*

I have quoted this at length, because I think this is a very important conversation. What it demonstrates to me is that, despite the contested nature of our working relationship, and the fact that we both have moments of frustration, there is also a recognition of the fact that we give weight to **the plurality of voices** in the process. In negotiating moments of compromise, we are also willing to acknowledge that each of us has moments within the work that are of personal significance to us individually, and which are reflective of the differences between us, rather than a **consensus**.

Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I all spoke about the ways in which we are prepared to fight for what we feel most strongly about in the process of making of our work. I discussed this with Lauren and Devaksha:

*DEVAKSHA: I think if there was a disagreement about something, you guys actually sorted it out in front of us<sup>66</sup>.*

*LAUREN: Yes...*

*TANYA: Often I suppose we would discuss it, and I think Tamar and I are reasonably good at compromising, so if one of us doesn't feel that strongly about something, we'll let it go, you know. But I do know that when I want something, and when I look at it I think, no that is absolutely not what I want, and I'm going to fight this point, then I will dig my heels in, and that is it.*

Each of us spoke in our discussions about the fact that we often “just said that we are going to agree to disagree”, as I phrased it; thus, we do not always seek to have agree, but rather tend to work in a way that is “**post-consensual**” ( Kolb, 2016, p. 68). Part of this ‘post-

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<sup>66</sup> This is an important observation that I will discuss in greater detail in Section 3 of this thesis.

consensuality lies in the fact that we are each willing to fight for what we feel to be important. As I put it to Tamar, *"If think it's important enough, I will fight you on it"*. Sometimes this contestation can be very heated; we all have strong personalities and strongly held opinions, and this can only lead to moments where our 'voices' are very different to each other. What is interesting is that, in general, this contestation is focussed more on the 'how' and the 'what' of the work, rather than the 'why': Tamar observed that *"We rarely argue over methods. I think we argue over concepts...over points of order, or points of debate, things we disagree with in terms of what we are making."* However, as Tamar and I agreed, *"the fight is not a personal fight. It's a fight about the work."* Again, this comes back to the fact of our friendship. I think because we are such good friends, we are able to separate the fact of our friendship out from our disagreement about the work. As I said to Tamar, *"If we don't agree on something in the rehearsal room, it doesn't mean anything in the bigger scheme of things"*. Certainly, we were able to articulate the fact that although we definitely have moments in rehearsal where we are frustrated and irritated with and by each other, these feelings were left 'at the door' so to speak, and did not affect our friendships outside of the rehearsal space. Our ability to work in this **post-consensual** and **contingent** manner is an important aspect of the ways in which we have embraced a **politics of difference** within our working relationships.

In order to sum up these 'inner workings' of my collaborative theatre-making practice, I am therefore able to say:

*My collaborative theatre-making practice is based on the fact that my collaborators and I have similar backgrounds and training, and that we have had a similar socialisation into the discipline in which we work. Despite this, however, our work together can be seen to be divergent, as we work outside of the centre, in ways that seek to challenge our 'professional socialisation'. Although our background and training is similar, my collaborators and I have discrete and complementary skills sets and 'knowings', and we wear different hats in the process of making our work. Nevertheless, we have developed a coherent working style, which is based on our shared vision and joint thinking.*

*Through our dialogic thinking and dual consciousness, we are able to co-construct the meanings embedded in our work. Within this 'thought community' we engage in mutual appropriation of skills, knowledge, and ideas. We are acutely aware of the politics of our collaboration, and work from different points of view and opinions. We are able to contest and debate our ideas, and work in a manner that can be considered post-consensual and contingent. Thus, we engage with the plurality of our voices in our work, embracing a politics of difference in our working relationships, while maintaining our personal relationships outside of the rehearsal space.*

4. *Where do the ideas come from in my collaborative theatre-making practice?*

*"Trains, planes, and automobiles"*

One of the hardest things to adequately describe in any creative process is the moment of ideation. As most creative people will attest, one of the most often-asked questions concerning their work is 'Where do your ideas come from?'. For most people, while they can perhaps point to the starting point of their thinking process, it is impossible to accurately and adequately map the meanderings of the brain as it builds and connects ideas in the creative process. Certainly, this is true of my own work; more often than not, I don't know where many of the ideas come from. They simply arrive, largely unbidden. However, as I explained in my RSI, when I think about this more carefully, it is clear that the ideas do arise from somewhere:

*I don't know where the ideas come from. I think they just appear sometimes, but often if I look at it retrospectively, I think but that comes from that fascination you have had, and that comes from that interest you have had. So it is all like a big kettle boiling around under the surface and then when you start working on a text or you work on a production the stuff pops to the surface.*

In seeking to understand the process of bringing creative ideas ‘to the surface’, and in trying to understand what I bring to the collaborative theatre-making process creatively, a close examination of the data has revealed a number of factors that influence or create the conditions for idea generation, **problem finding** (Sawyer, 2003c, 2007), **problem solving**, and ‘**flow**’ (Csiksentmihalyi, 2014, pp. 136-137).

As we have seen in Chapter 6, at its heart, creative collaboration involves both **problem finding** and **problem solving**. Similarly, as we saw in Section 1 of this thesis, devising also engages with these same processes; in improvising and brainstorming, we engage in a process of **problem finding**, and once we have created the work, we rehearse and polish it in a process of **problem solving**. While it is largely seen as the ‘second part’ of this equation, for me the **problem solving** aspect of the theatre has always held a great fascination for me. In my RSI, Tamar and I spoke at length about this:

*TANYA: But I think I have always just loved the magic. It is magic, and I always wanted to understand how the magic worked. To me understanding what was going on behind the scenes was absolutely fascinating and it still is. I sit there and I watch productions, and I am thinking how did they do that? How did they make that happen? How did they get this to work? I want to know how all the time.*

*TAMAR: The mechanics of it.*

*TANYA: The mechanics of it and to work it out to think okay, how do we make that happen.*

*TAMAR: And how would you make something happen.*

To me, this need to understand the ‘how’ of the magic of theatre, to be able to find ways to solve the practical and creative problems inherent in creating the magic, is a vital part of who I am as a theatre-maker. This is one aspect of my practice that tends to drive other people mad; members of my family often refuse to sit next to me when watching a theatrical performance, as they don’t want to hear my musings on how I think the ‘magic’ that they are enjoying is being made. Tamar wryly commented on the fact that “*even when we are watching the Passion Play at Oberammergau, you are going, but how did they make*

*him bleed through the nail holes?”*. This is always the way that I see theatre; I always want to know what is going on ‘behind the curtain’ so to speak. Therefore, my theatre-making practice is predicated on the idea that through rehearsal and through dealing with the practical and pragmatic demands of mounting a theatrical production, I am engaging in a complex process of **problem solving** both physically and intellectually.

On the other hand, the processes of **problem finding** (Sawyer, 2003c, 2007) are equally complex and multi-faceted within our collaborative theatre-making practice. In finding new problems, and in solving them, we are working in a way that is **generative**, as we bring the processes of problem finding and problem solving to bear in the creation of something new; the theatrical work. There are a number of different forces that allow us to find problems, and generate new ideas, within our work.

The first of these is our **friendship**. The amount of time we spend together is significant, and a large part of that time together is not spent working. Rather, we have travelled together extensively, we often meet socially for lunch, Tamar spends a lot of time with my family, and so we have a lot of shared experience from which to build our ideas. When Tamar and I spoke about the importance in particular that our travelling together has for our work, I observed that

*I think all that stuff, it feeds into the work. All that stuff that we do when we’re travelling, it comes out somewhere. It’s like all that raw material goes in somewhere, and the fact that that raw material happens in a shared space of travelling together or spending time together is important, because we have both had separate things where we’ve come and we said I’ve read this or I’ve seen this, but generally I think the most generative ideas often come from things that we’ve done together when we’ve travelled.*

The significance of travel as a generative factor in our problem finding I think lies in the fact that when we travel we are opening ourselves up to a range of new experiences; we tend to visit art museums and interesting exhibitions, see theatrical performances, and try as far as

possible to engage both the history and the culture of the place that we are visiting. What this does is create what Tamar calls “*a well spring*” of ideas, impressions, and memories that we then bring to bear in the making of our work. The other important thing about travel as a generative factor is that it is something that happens outside of our normal lives:

*TAMAR: Sometimes it is important to get away from our normal environment to discuss our project. Definitely.*

*TANYA: Absolutely. Trains, planes, and...*

*TAMAR: And automobiles.*

*TANYA: And automobiles, and glasses of wine and...*

*TAMAR: Absolutely. I can't recommend it enough. That's absolutely an essential part of it.*

*TANYA: It is, because you do need to be out of the space of everyday life, of the demands of the department, the demands of the children.*

*TAMAR: And also, I think what happens when you go into a new space, whatever new space it is, you're taken out of a comfort zone in some way. So it makes you think and as soon as you think, things occur to you. And then because you have a dialogue, that thinking can then lead to more thinking; you are kind of thinking tangentially. And I think that happens when you move out of your habitual zones.*

*TANYA: Yes. And I think we've always been very good at kind of using those sort of strange spaces, like sitting on planes, we've always been quite good at using that sort of dead space, dead time, as a space in which to do a whole lot of creative thinking.*

Thus, in moving out of our comfort zone, and opening ourselves up to a range of experiences, we are able to use the time and the place of travel as generative spaces for problem finding. We use our experiences as raw material for our creative processes, as we engage with paintings, images, sculpture, novels, poems, and other artefacts.

Added to this is each of our own sets of eclectic interests and fascinations, which we also bring to bear on the work that we do. While I have often felt that my own interests in topics



such as the music and popular culture of the 1960s is largely ‘useless’, Tamar disagreed, noting this knowledge has served us well in a number of productions:

*TANYA: Well, I think some of it is quite esoteric and sort of arcane in some ways. So some of the stuff, I just think nobody else is going to think that’s a good idea because it’s just me and all my strange stuff that I know.*

*TAMAR: But when I hear those ideas, I’m like wow, that’s amazing. Let’s do more of that. I mean I remember doing **Twelfth Night**, and I was so amazed at all this music knowledge that you had, that you could just rattle off all these things, and know all this stuff.*

*TANYA: But you see, it’s all this useless information that I have.*

*TAMAR: But it’s not useless. And I think that is what makes it interesting, because you want to be able to have these tangential discussions that go into places that you never imagined, and being able to talk about things that are random, like the guy with the Electric Kool-Aid acid trips.*

The way that we use each other’s knowledge base outside of the theatre as a way to create moments of **problem finding** also links to the notion of **mutual appropriation** (John-Steiner, 2000); in creating new ideas from what we already each know, we are engaging in a process of learning from each other. In creative conversations, as we exchange ideas and ‘knowings’, we once again use our processes of **joint thinking** (John-Steiner, 2000) and dialogue as the means to generate new insights.

Another important generator of ideas and problems in our creative process is, surprisingly, critique. While this is an important part of the **politics of our collaboration** (Ruhsam, 2016), and could be a very destructive force if mishandled, Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I all agreed that for us, critique acts as a positive, **generative** factor in our work. As with our handling of disagreements, we tend to see the critique of our collective work as something that is separate from our friendship, and not personal. However, it is probably because we are such good friends to begin with, that our creative process can weather critique. As Tamar explained to me, she sees constructive critique as an important part of the collaborative relationship;

*I think in a collaborative relationship you have to be willing to be a critic, and be critiqued. Otherwise it's not honest... But in a constructive way. There's no use to criticism if it's not constructive, particularly in the theatre. Why would you tell somebody that something's terrible if you can't tell them how to fix it?*

Thus, we use constructive critique as a way of creating new connections between ideas, as we act as 'critical friends' for each other in the creative process.

A second factor that could in some cases be very destructive, but which we see as a positive and generative factor in our work is the pressure of too little time. We talked extensively in all my interviews about the fact that the *FrontLines* Project has, in every iteration, had to be devised and rehearsed in a very short space of time. This sense of 'no time to waste' came up again and again in our discussions, and while we all agreed that it increased the stress level exponentially, it also created a 'pressure cooker' situation that was extremely generative. As I remarked to Tamar "*It's like a pressure cooker. It denatures and reforms things and people in ways that are unexpected*". This sense of working under pressure was certainly very exciting, and created a space in which huge leaps were made. In my RSI, I explained that

*I think what it does, what it did certainly in [the **FrontLines**] process was to create this incredible creative energy that affected everybody. The pressure of that constraint of time, and that we had nothing to start with, made everybody think so creatively and think completely out of the box and we just threw everything into that mix. In that kind of process, you can't overthink, you have to just do. So you start to not just live inside your head, you actually just have to get on with it and make.*

The pressurised environment of the *FrontLines* Project created a space in which both **problem finding** and **problem solving** were happening simultaneously as we simply 'made it up as we went along'. In doing so, we had to call on our imaginative skills and our theatrical knowledge, to help us to make the leaps from one idea to the next.

Of course, as with all creative processes, this sense of heightened working is reflective of the fact that we were working in a state of **group flow**. Brandon and Kamini spoke to me about their sense of creative ferment in the project:

*BRANDON: I enjoyed it! I loved having the freedom. Because it's very creative, and you really start to see what other people are capable off, when they start opening up their minds.*

*KAMINI: Yeah ... My favourite was also the group work. When we were given something to do together and come up with an image or something like that.*

For many of the students I interviewed, they identified a sense of freedom and openness in the process that allowed them to enter into this state of **flow** (Csiksentmihalyi, 2014), where everyone was working off each other's ideas, working from moment to moment in the making of the theatrical piece. Many of them also agreed that the process enormously enjoyable; as Devaksha put it "We had so much fun". This points to the **autotelic** nature of creative work; the work is its own reward.

For Tamar and I, we are very used to working in a state of **group flow** (Sawyer, 2003c). The way that we seem to work almost instinctively and seamlessly off each other's ideas is a very important part of our process, and on the odd occasion where we can't seem to make it work, it can come as something of a shock:

*TAMAR: And it is quite interesting in the directing process, because when it doesn't happen it kind of pulls me up short. Like when there's a moment when we don't know what to do, and we're like...*

*TANYA: Yes, we just look at each other blankly.*

*TAMAR: What can we do here? I mean when you start to notice that it's not there it means that it's there pretty much all the time.*

*TANYA: There almost all the time, yes.*

This sense of working in a state of **flow** is based on our **shared intention** and **joint thinking**, as well as on our deep knowledge and understanding of theatre, which allows us to work organically 'at the speed of thinking' in a manner that is instinctive, intuitive and visceral.

In looking more closely at where the ideas come from in my collaborative theatre-making practice, I can conclude that

*In creating a theatrical work, we engage in complex processes of idea generation, problem finding, problem solving, and 'flow'. In making a piece of theatre, I engage in physical and intellectual problem solving, as I seek to understand and make the 'magic' of theatre happen. Both problem finding and problem solving can be seen to be generative, as part of the process of making something new. There are different factors that allow us to find new problems and generate new ideas in our work. The first of these is our friendship; the time we spend together and our shared experiences allow us to generate new ideas. An important part of this idea generation comes from the time we spend travelling together; outside of our normal, everyday life, we are exposed to a wide range of shared experiences that create a well-spring of inspiration for our work. To this we also bring our own interests and fascinations, which we share through the process of mutual appropriation, based on our joint thinking and dialogue. Constructive critique also operates as a generative force within our work, challenging us and growing the work. The pressure of too little time generates new ideas as we engage in a state of group flow. This state of flow, which exists between my collaborators and I, and also between us and the students we work with, is based on our shared intention and vision, and our joint thinking. The state of flow and our enjoyment of the process point to the autotelic nature of the work that we do; the process is its own reward.*

## *Conclusions*

In discussing the four sub-questions in this chapter, I have been able to elucidate a clear, theorised understanding of my own collaborative practice, and the role that I play in that practice. In grappling with the origins of my collaborative theatre-making practice; the

sharing of vision, burdens and ownership in my practice; the internal workings of that practice; and where the ideas come from in my collaborative theatre-making practice, I am closer to being able to formulate a clear response to my critical question.

The next chapter, therefore, seeks to understand my self-in-action through a close examination of what I can learn about myself from the data. In looking at the ways in which my collaborators and the students we work with describe me, I will attempt to understand the different 'selves' that I bring the collaborative theatre-making process.

## Chapter 8

### *What does the data teach me about myself as a collaborator?*

*“...thinking about you as a collaborator, partly what I love is the ability and the freedom to go on these circular journeys that come back to the point.”*

While all of the above discussion in Chapter 7 has drawn a picture of how and why I contribute to the collaborative process, it does not provide a very direct or simple answer to my critical question “Who am I as a collaborator?” The four sub-questions I have discussed above have certainly provided me with a far more nuanced insight into my collaborative theatre-making process, but they don’t go all the way to helping me to understand the personal qualities, values, and ways of thinking that I bring to the process.

In order to gain some understanding of this, I needed to look closely at the ways in which Tamar and Marié-Heleen in particular answered some of my probing questions. When speaking to them, as part of the discussion thrown up by their responses to the Q-sort, I had asked each of them directly to characterise me as a collaborator, and describe what it is like to collaborate with me. Each of them answered me at length, with what I felt to be a high degree of honesty, by providing me with a fairly long list of descriptive phrases and adjectives that they would use to describe who I am as a collaborator. I also combed through my interviews with the student participants; while I had not asked them the same questions, I was able to glean a number of other descriptive words and phrases from their responses to other questions.

I created a very rough list of these, and then used them to create the following mind-map, where I tried to group these words and phrases thematically.

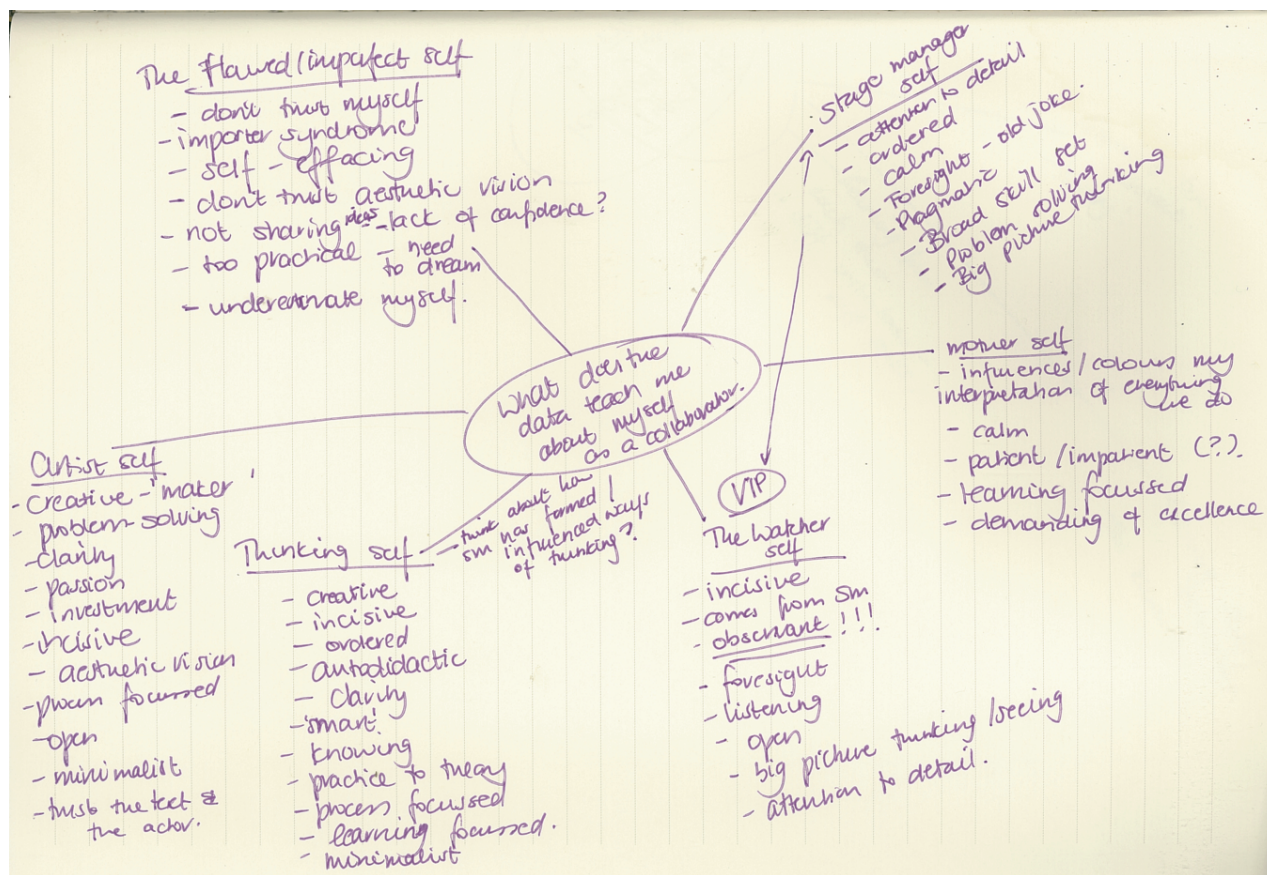


Figure 42: A visual map of the ways in which my respondents described me as a collaborator.

What this revealed to me was that I can conceive of a series of 'selves' that are me as a collaborator; the Stage Manager self, the Mother self, the Watcher self, the Thinking self, the Artist self, and the Flawed self. For each of these selves, using the list of adjectives and descriptive phrases that my data had generated, I was able to form a Word Cloud, which encompassed each of the aspects of who I am as a collaborator. Of course, I do not have the scope in this thesis to discuss each of these in a vast amount of detail, and analyse every single thing that my collaborators have said about me. Rather, what I have chosen to do here is to present a general, summative discussion of each of these selves, showing how the ways in which I have been described by others has helped me to understand myself. In so doing, I have also looked closely at my RSI, to find the resonances and similarities between what others see, and what I see about myself.

### 1. The Stage Manager self



It has become increasingly clear to me as this study has progressed, that so much of what I think and do as a theatre-maker, is because I was a Stage Manager first. The practical stage skills, the interpersonal communication skills, and the organisational skills that I developed while working as a Stage Manager have all continued to be the basis of my practice. I believe that a large part of why I am a collaborator is because Stage Managers have to be good at working with others, as they are the one person in any production who has to interact and communicate with every single other artist and technician working on a show. As I explained to Tamar in my RSI, *“As a Stage Manager you have to work with other people. You have to be able to work with other people, and I think it spills over into the way that I direct.”* My own sense of it has always been that the Stage Manager sits at the centre of the spider web that is the production, and connects all the different parts, and this is certainly something that has influenced the way that I work in collaboration with others.

In my RSI, Tamar challenged me to think about the skills and ways of thinking that I have carried over from being a Stage Manager, into my directing and theatre-making practice. My response reveals a deep understanding that my years as a Stage Manager have, in many ways, made me the director and theatre-maker I am today:



*I think that that's a difference in the way that I direct is that I don't just think 'I have got a vision and it must happen'. I think how is that going to happen, what do I have to do and sometimes I have to go 'okay that can't happen because I can't find a way to make it happen on stage'. I know in my head that that's technically very, very difficult and virtually impossible and I am not the kind of director who would go in and say well do it anyway. I think having had that experience of having been a Stage Manager and having people make absolutely unreasonable demands, makes me a director who tries not to make unreasonable demands. I try very hard to make it possible for the crew and for the designers and everybody who is working with us to actually do what is within the realm of possibility. But I think there are other skills. I think that a Stage Manager has to be able to listen, hard. They have to be very observant because they have to pick up on things that are going on around them and make notes of problems, and fix those problems before they have even happened. And it is that sense of anticipating the problem before it arises, and fixing it before the director even notices that there is a problem. I think I try to do that... I think that does affect how I direct, is that I will see the problem coming before it has even got there and I will see the problem coming in the performance, in what the actor is doing, which I think sometimes irritates them because I will catch them and give them the note before they have even done it.*

Thus, Stage Management has taught me to be a pragmatic, listening, observant director, who is able to foresee problems before they arise.

When I analysed the ways in which my collaborators described me, it became apparent that many of the skills and attributes they were identifying were all things that had developed as a result of my Stage-Management experience. These included my high level of attention to detail, my ordered and calm approach (if the Stage Manager in a production panics, disaster is surely imminent!), my broad theatrical and stage skills, my ability to problem-solve and foresee problems before they happen (as the old joke goes, "How many Stage Managers does it take to screw in a.... oh, it's already done"), and my ability to see the

‘big picture’ of a production, and to consider all the moving parts of a theatrical performance, can all be linked back directly to my experience as a Stage Manager.

## 2. *The Mother self*



At a research seminar a number of years ago, a colleague asked me to think about the ways in which the fact that I am a mother influences and changes what I do as a theatre-maker. At the time, I was struck by her question, but really did not know how to answer it. I do not think that I am particularly ‘motherly’ in relation to my students, and there was, at first, no obvious answer to her question.

However, the thought has stayed with me, and when I began to look at the data, it became apparent to me that I could, in fact, see ways in which the reality that I am a mother influences what I do and who I am as a collaborator. As I looked at the interviews, I noticed that I came back time and time again to the idea of how having children affected my work. On a practical level, of course, having them means that I cannot simply go off and rehearse every evening or every weekend. My theatre-making work has to fit in around the needs of two young boys, both with busy lives, who need me more than the production, my

collaborators, or my students ever will. Being a mother has meant that over the years, my ability to completely submerge myself into a theatrical project has been increasingly curtailed. My family's needs have to come first, and while I sometimes am frustrated by the fact that I have to leave earlier, or cannot take on as many projects as before, this is a reality that I cannot change. Because both Tamar and Marié-Heleen are not mothers, the demands on their time are different, and so we have had to negotiate this as part of our sharing of the burden of the creative process.

Being a mother also colours my view of what we are doing in profound ways. One example of this is the way in which I related to the material that we included in the *FrontLines* Project; the letters and other pieces of text that held the most emotional resonance for me all had to do with the relationships between mothers and their sons. The students all commented on the fact that I cried during every rehearsal and every performance, and that emotional response often came out of my own emotional 'mother heart'.

While I consciously try not to cast myself in the 'mother role' with my students and cast members, it is clear that they felt that I had a very patient and caring approach. Lauren commented on this, saying:

*Oh you're very patient with us. I think with a cast of that size and the amount of material that we had to get through in such a small amount of time, the fact that you could actually sit there and devote even two extra minutes to a performer who needed a little bit of extra help was awesome.*

While I (and Tamar) would characterise myself as very impatient at times, it is evident that the students felt that I was patient with them, and cared about them enough to spend extra time with them, helping them to fine-tune their performance.

Another aspect of my work that I feel reflects my Mother self is that fact that I am, as Marié-Heleen put it “*incredibly focussed on learning*”. To me, it is imperative that students learn from the process of collaborative theatre-making, and while Section 3 of this thesis will discuss this in far greater depth than I am able to here, it does seem to me that this focus on learning and on the development of the students, is related to my mothering instincts. Like any parent, I want the best for the children in my care, and this feeling extends to the students whose learning I am responsible for. At the same time, like any parent, I can be demanding of excellence; I challenge my students because I fully believe that this is in their best interest, and that by expecting more of them, I am making it possible for them to grow and develop.

### 3. *The Watcher self*



Quite early on in my process of thinking about and analysing my own practice as a collaborative theatre-maker, I spent some time examining the rehearsal photographs and videos that were made during our preparations for the Pretoria version of the *FrontLines* Project. I had asked our technical manager, Luke, to try to document the process of me, as I felt that this would be vital in trying to understand what it is that I am doing when I work collaboratively. In the end, while the photographs have proved helpful, I have not really

made much use of the video material. However, what both of them revealed was something that I was aware of on an unconscious level, but that became very apparent when I looked at the evidence. While the photographs and videos consistently show Tamar and Marié-Heleen working at the front of the stage, actively engaged with the students and what they are doing, in many cases, I am often not pictured with them, simply because I am sitting up in the auditorium, watching what is happening. This really struck me; at first I thought, perhaps that I was too distanced and removed from the process, that I somehow wasn't as involved as my collaborators were in the making of the work. However, it was while we were engaged in my RSI, that I had something of a revelation:

*I didn't study directing as such. I have never studied directing technique. I know how to do it because I was a stage manager. So I think I learnt how to direct by observation. And I think observation is very important in my process. I think I do a lot of sitting and watching. If I do a comparative thing; you [Tamar] tend to, when you are directing you are on your feet the whole time and you are doing. I sit and watch and then I say no, wait, stop, don't do this, and for a long time I thought 'you are being too passive' but I have realised that it isn't about passivity. It is about observation.*

For me, this was an 'aha!' moment. Suddenly I realised that what I had initially perceived as a weakness in my work, was just a different way of approaching the work. As Tamar noted "*the broad stroke is clear to you*"; because I tend to sit back and look at the bigger picture of what is happening on the stage, I am able to see the whole of the canvas of what we are trying to achieve.

What then came out of the interviews with Tamar and Marié-Heleen, was that they both characterised me very strongly as observant and incisive. To me, these two things go hand in hand; because I am a watcher, I work through a process of observation. Through careful observation, and equally focussed listening, I am able to see to the heart of a problem or an issue. Tamar was very clear in her description of this aspect of my practice;

*You're very good at making observations to clarify things. And it's a very, very strong point. You're very incisive. So you are able to cut through stuff and go 'there's the problem'. Its being able to manage the orderliness of it with ease.*

As a result of my close observation and careful listening (which I believe go hand in hand), I am able to pay close attention to detail, while also being able to foresee problems before they happen.

This ability to observe also extends to life outside of the rehearsal room. It has become apparent to me that I am not only a watcher in the creative theatre-making process, but also in life. When I interviewed Tamar, I observed that *"to be a good director, you have to be a good observer of life, because you have to have observed human behaviour"*. This is important to me; I have come to understand that this quality of observation and incisiveness, rather than being a weakness in my work, is probably my greatest strength.

#### 4. The Thinking self



In considering my Watcher self, and in thinking about Tamar's questions about what ways of thinking I have carried over from Stage Management, led me to examine in closer detail the way that I think and the types of thinking that I bring to my collaborative theatre-making practice. All my theatre work is an enactment of my thinking; it is thinking brought to life on the stage. Thus, the ways in which I think, and the types of thinking that I bring to the process determine, to a large extent, to the type of theatre that I make.

As we have already seen, much of what I do and think as a theatre-maker is determined by the fact that I was a Stage Manager. Another aspect that I think is important is that fact that I never had any formal training as a director. In many ways, I could be considered an autodidact. Instead of formal classes in directing, I learned to direct through observing others, and through reading and studying great directors like Peter Brook, who was the subject of my Masters study. I think this has created in me a sense that I don't need to make theatre in any prescribed way; I am willing to follow my instincts and use my wide theatrical knowledge, without any sense of having to 'stick to the rules' in my practice.

My collaborators characterised me as a creative, incisive thinker. I am ordered in my approach, and this counterbalances Tamar's own admission that she is "*not very good at order*". Because I am ordered and incisive in my thinking, I am able to create clarity out of moments of apparent chaos. In many ways, I am something of a minimalist; I tend to remove the 'noise' to simplify a concept or an idea, in the pursuit of clarity.

Tamar characterised both of us as "*smart*" in her assessment of me. I think what she meant was that we have a wide range of 'knowings' that I am able to bring to the work. She explained that, "*I don't mean that in a kind of facetious way. I think, because we read, because we engage with the world, I think we're interested in the world, so we bring [that] to it.*" This sense of value in what I know and what I think is an important part of the Thinking self that I bring to the process of collaborative theatre-making.

Marié-Heleen spoke to me about the fact that she sees me as process-focused and learning focused; to me, these two things go hand in hand. Because the learning of the students is important to me, I am very focused on the process of what we are doing, rather than on the product. While the quality of the finished theatrical work is important, to me the learning that happens within that process is more important. Linked to this is the fact that I tend to think from practice to theory; I work practically and instinctively, and then later use theory to understand what we have done and why we did it.

### 5. *The Artist self*



At the heart of who I am as a collaborator lies the fact that I am making a work of art. Thus, my creative, artistic self is a crucial part of who I am as a collaborator. I have come to see myself as a 'maker' of all sorts of things; even in my spare time, I spend a lot of my time knitting or sewing, or engaging in other crafts. The fact that I *make* things is integral to who I am, and offers me an enormous amount of pleasure. These acts of 'making' are all, in a way, attempts to solve a problem of one sort or another. In trying to solve the problems inherent in making a shawl, or in directing a play, I am focussed on the process, rather than the product.



My sense of myself as an artist is, of course, deeply tied up with my Thinking self. The qualities of clarity and incisiveness that I identified as part of my ways of thinking, are also an important part of my ways of making as a creative person. I have a fairly strong sense of aesthetic vision, and I bring this to bear upon my work in numerous ways. Because I am open to new ideas and concepts, I am able to bring these to the art that I make, to enrich the work that I do.

My approach as an artist is influenced by my tendency to be a minimalist; in art, I often believe that 'less is more'. I like to use strong images, stillness and silence as powerful statements on the stage. In my RSI, I explained that, as a director, I trust in the text:

*The text is the text, and it will tell its own story... it must be embodied and it must be believable, but if you don't get in the text's way, if it's a good text it will stand on its own and it will tell its own story.,*

What this means to me is that I see my job as a director and maker of theatre as allowing the story to tell itself; I don't like to add too many things, or embellish a performance too much. Rather, I prefer to work for a simple, clear style of playing that will allow the truth of the text to speak. Similarly, I tend not to be a director who tells an actor exactly what to do. Rather, I trust the actors I work with to bring their considerable talents to bear on the embodiment of the role. Part of my job as a director is to guide them in their interpretation, by asking the right questions, which will spur them on to uncover for themselves the meaning of their role, and the text.

When asked to characterise me as a collaborator, Marié-Heleen said:

*What overrides are the idea of creativity and learning, and you know what, passion! The absolute whole embodied engagement in what you're doing with the students, with the show, the thematic content, with everything. And*

*investment; you're not doing something that you're not in. If you're in something, you're invested in that.*

To me, this sums up so much of my artistic approach; if I am involved in making a theatrical work, I bring to it a sense of investment and passion. I am completely engaged with what I am doing, and bring to bear all that I have in my arsenal of skills, in the making of a new work.

## 6. The Flawed self



Of course, no one is perfect, and while I have been able to identify a number of strengths that I bring to the collaborative theatre-making process, the data has also helped me to grapple with and examine the weaknesses in my approach. I have chosen to call this the Flawed self, in an attempt to convey the ways in which my personality and personal faults can have a negative effect on my work.

The biggest flaw that my collaborators identified in my approach is that I often tend not to trust myself and my own judgement, in the theatre-making process. I underestimate my own contribution to what we are doing. Tamar summed this up when she said:

*I don't think you trust yourself enough. Like you often say you don't know how to block<sup>67</sup>, and I kind of think 'But you do know how to block'. I don't think you trust yourself enough with that."*

In thinking about this, I can link this back to the sense of 'imposter syndrome' that I spoke about in the Introductory chapter of this thesis. Despite all my years of working in the theatre, and all my experience, I am still sometimes crippled by the thought that I don't actually know what I am doing, and so I tend to doubt and undermine myself. Part of this is that despite the fact that while both Tamar and Marié-Heleen identified a sense of aesthetic vision as one of my strengths, they also both agreed that I don't trust my own sense of aesthetics.

This also reflects in the fact that I tend to very self-effacing. Tamar again characterised this when she commented that:

*I do think sometimes that you don't push yourself enough. I sometimes think that you are not assertive enough; you allow yourself to be not assertive, if that makes sense. Like you take a backwards step.*

This sense of 'stepping back' from the work reflects in the fact that my collaborators felt that I sometimes don't share my ideas freely enough; I am, at times content to just go with their ideas, rather than fight for my own.

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<sup>67</sup> In theatrical parlance, 'blocking' is the process of arranging the actors on stage, and planning all the moves and actions of a scene. It is often the first stage of the rehearsal process, and one that I dislike, as I often feel that I simply can't do it.

Another weakness that my collaborators identified was a tendency to think too much like a technician, and not enough like a director. For Marié-Heleen, this manifested in the amount of time I spent teaching students the technical skills they needed for their work on the production. To her, this seemed “*overly responsible*”; she felt that as a director I should have left the task to the technical crew. Tamar saw things slightly differently; for her, I am often “*too practical*” in my approach, and she encouraged me to “*Allow yourself to dream a bit*”. What both of them was trying to articulate, I think, is that this is the downside of my history as a Stage Manager; I have never stopped thinking like one. So, instead of seeing every problem that the production throws up through an exclusively creative ‘directorial’ eye, I tend to see them through the eyes of the technicians, who will have to make them happen. The end result, as I “*try very hard to make it possible for the crew and for the designers and everybody who is working with us to actually do what is within the realm of possibility*” is that I will allow my sense of practicality to outweigh my aesthetic choices.

### *A Distillation*

In considering what I have learnt about myself as a collaborator, I am able to conclude that

***The selves that I have identified through my examination of the data; the Stage Manager self, the Mother self, the Watcher self, the Thinking self, the Artist self, and the Flawed self, all co-exist and overlap within my collaborative theatre-making practice. I am not any one of these things on their own; rather, my practice is an enactment of all of these selves simultaneously.***

### *In Conclusion*

To sum up my response to the critical question “Who am I as a collaborator?”, I have had to consider my collaborative theatre-making practice from a variety of angles. Through

this prismatic, 'crystallized' view, generated out of the data, I am able to reach the following broad conclusions:

*My collaborative relationship with Tamar is based on our deep and lasting friendship. While this collaborative relationship began casually, and organically, we have made a conscious and deliberate choice to collaborate with each other. We are aware that the type of collaborative relationship we have is rare, and that it is not possible to work in this way with everybody. Our choice to collaborate also includes the type of projects that we will take on, and we are increasingly drawn to projects that are personally significant to us. Our collaborative relationship demonstrates a high level of interdependence and mutuality, and is based on trust. We work in a way that is synergistic and symbiotic, and others see us as being 'in sync' with each other. Our high level of trust in each other allows us to share the risk of creative work, while also allowing our collaborative relationship to have a very long life-span. This sense of trust also allows us to anticipate each other's ideas and feelings, as well as motivate each other at all times in our work.*

*My collaborative theatre-making practice is based on a strong sense of shared vision. A shared ontological position with regards to theatre and its value forms the meta-structural intention that underpins the work that we do. In each of our projects, we engage with a shared and coherent vision of what we think the project will be. This shared vision emerges out of the 'betweenness' of our collaborative relationship. In sharing a vision for the work, we also share the practical, physical and emotional burdens of the work, in ways that seem particularly gendered. Working together helps us to stave off the loneliness that can be implicit in the director's role, and we are able to act as 'cheerleaders' for each other. Because this is a function of our interdependence, we are also able to have a sense of shared ownership of both the process and the product of our work. This sense of shared ownership extends to our written academic work, and also encompasses the students that we work with, who feel an equal sense of ownership of the work we have done with them.*

*My collaborative theatre-making practice is based on the fact that my collaborators and I have similar backgrounds and training, and that we have had a similar socialisation into the discipline in which we work. Despite this, however, our work together can be seen to be divergent, as we work outside of the centre, in ways that seek to challenge our 'professional socialisation'. Although our background and training is similar, my collaborators and I have discrete and complementary skills sets and 'knowings', and we wear different hats in the process of making our work. Nevertheless, we have developed a coherent working style, which is based on our shared vision and joint thinking. Through our dialogic thinking and dual consciousness, we are able to co-construct the meanings embedded in our work. Within this 'thought community' we engage in mutual appropriation of skills, knowledge, and ideas. We are acutely aware of the politics of our collaboration, and work from different points of view and opinions. We are able to contest and debate our ideas, and work in a manner that can be considered post-consensual and contingent. Thus, we engage with the plurality of our voices in our work, embracing a politics of difference in our working relationships, while maintaining our personal relationships outside of the rehearsal space.*

*In creating a theatrical work, we engage in complex processes of idea generation, problem finding, problem solving, and 'flow'. In making a piece of theatre, I engage in physical and intellectual problem solving, as I seek to understand and make the 'magic' of theatre happen. Both problem finding and problem solving can be seen to be generative, as part of the process of making something new. There are different factors that allow us to find new problems and generate new ideas in our work. The first of these is our friendship; the time we spend together and our shared experiences allow us to generate new ideas. An important part of this idea generation comes from the time we spend travelling together; outside of our normal, everyday life, we are exposed to a wide range of shared experiences that create a well-spring of inspiration for our*

*work. To this we also bring our own interests and fascinations, which we share through the process of mutual appropriation, based on our joint thinking and dialogue. Constructive critique also operates as a generative force within our work, challenging us and growing the work. The pressure of too little time generates new ideas as we engage in a state of group flow. This state of flow, which exists between my collaborators and I, and also between us and the students we work with, is based on our shared intention and vision, and our joint thinking. The state of flow and our enjoyment of the process point to the autotelic nature of the work that we do; the process is its own reward.*

*The selves that I have identified through my examination of the data; the Stage Manager self, the Mother self, the Watcher self, the Thinking self, the Artist self, and the Flawed self, all co-exist and overlap within my collaborative theatre-making practice. I am not any one of these things on their own; rather, my practice is an enactment of all of these selves simultaneously.*

Having drawn these conclusions, I have been able to develop a highly nuanced and detailed understanding of who I am as a collaborator. A significant aspect of this has been the realisation of the importance of learning in my collaborative theatre-making practice. The next Section of the thesis will therefore move on to grapple with the ways in which collaborative theatre-making can make a space for teaching and learning, both for my collaborators and myself, and for the students we work with.

### *SECTION 3: How does my practice of collaborative theatre-making create a space for teaching and learning? Why?*

Having come to a more nuanced understanding of the workings of my collaborative theatre-making practice, and a clearer sense of who I am as a collaborator, I am able to move on to the consideration of the educational effect of my practice. Thus, this section of the thesis seeks to answer my third critical question:

- How does my practice of collaborative theatre-making create a space for teaching and learning? Why?

To answer this question, I undertake a brief discussion of Drama in Education, Theatre in Education, and Performance Studies, to contextualise the ways in which Drama and Theatre are recognised as engendering both teaching and learning, and to explore the kinds of knowledge generated by the study of performance. I will then go on to grapple with the different types of teaching and learning which took place in the *FrontLines* Project, as revealed by the data. To do so, I have drawn on:

- data generated through my interviews with both of my collaborators, Marié-Heleen and Tamar;
- data generated through my interviews with students who were involved in the *FrontLines* project;
- my own Reciprocal Self Interview (RSI).

Similarly, to the way in which I handled the data in Section 2, I once again worked at first instinctively and organically, simply looking for the places in which any of my participants attempted to articulate either what they were trying to teach in the project, or what they had learned, or both. Once I had noted these, I was able to go back and code the data, by trying to understand the different types of teaching and learning that were taking place.



Once I had done this, I was able to identify a number of categories or types of teaching and learning, and I will explore these in detail in Chapter 9.

The second half of my critical question concerns the ‘why’ of teaching and learning in the *FrontLines* Project, and so Chapter 10 will grapple with understanding the processes of teaching and learning that are taking place. To do so, I will consider the work of Lev Vygotsky, and in particular, his notion of the Zone of Proximal Development. This theoretical framing will then be used to interpret the data further, in order to answer the second part of my critical question, as I seek to understand not only the type of teaching and learning happening, but also the processes that are making teaching and learning happen within the frame of the *FrontLines* Project.

## CHAPTER 9

### *Teaching, learning, and knowing*

*“LAUREN: We learnt so much.*

*DEVAKSHA: We had such a great time.”*

*“KAMINI: I loved meeting new people, and laughing together, and trying, and getting it wrong, and trying again...”*

We already know that theatre and drama are powerful forces for both teaching and learning; this is certainly not new. Even the ancient Greeks, who invented theatre as we know it, as well as the Romans and the early Christians, knew the educative power of theatre and used it to encourage debate, or to reinforce moral and religious teachings. The liturgical drama of the Middle Ages is probably the most obvious example of this early use of theatre and drama to teach. Throughout history, theatre and drama have been used to convey ways of thinking and seeing to an audience; one example of this is Shakespeare’s ‘history’ plays which were written to suit the Tudor view of the world, and not with historical accuracy in mind. In the Twentieth century, in addition to the educative function of the works of Berthold Brecht and many other dramatists, we also saw the evolution of both Drama in Education (also known as Creative Drama in the USA (McCaslin, 1996)), and Theatre in Education as distinct areas of study and expertise, which promoted different ways of using performative means to engender teaching and learning.

A distinction is made in these different approaches between Drama and Theatre, as expressed by Brian Way, one of the most important early thinkers in Drama in Education:

... 'theatre' is largely concerned with the *communication* between actors and an audience; 'drama' is largely concerned with *experience* by the participants, irrespective of any function of communication to an audience. (Way, 1967, p. 2)

Based on the tension between these two different approaches, Drama in Education is largely seen to be primarily concerned with drama within the classroom, based on ideas about play and creativity, and not designed for an audience (O'Neill & Lambert, 1982; Fleming, 1994; Taylor P. , 2000). Theatre in Education, by contrast, is widely defined as theatre made and performed by adults, for children, in a school setting, with a clear educational aim (O'Toole, 1976; Jackson, 1993; Nicholson, 2009 & 2011). Thus, there are two quite different ways of working here. As Edward Bond puts it "Theatre may help you to find yourself in society, drama requires you to find society in you" (Bond, 2009, p. xii).

My own thinking about the way that drama can act as a means of teaching and learning is deeply shaped by the ideas of Dorothy Heathcote (Wagner, 1999; Heathcote & Bolton, 1995), which focus on allowing children (or in my case, students) to access what they "already know, but don't yet know that they know" (Wagner, 1999, p. 13). Widely considered to be "One of the greatest teachers of [the twentieth] century" (Dr John Carroll, quoted in Hesten, 1994)<sup>68</sup>, Heathcote herself wrote about her educational philosophy in the following way:

*If I have any teaching wisdom, it is that I have learnt to know  
the struggle is the learning process;  
and the skills of teaching lie  
in making this time slow enough for enquiry;*

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<sup>68</sup> Heathcote's career spans more than 40 years, and she has been the source of many of the most innovative concepts and ideas in Drama in Education, which are studied and explored all over the world. Needless to say, I do not have the space in this thesis to deal with anything but the most basic level of description of her work and ideas.

*interesting enough to loiter along the way;  
rigorous enough for being buffeted in the matrix of ideas;  
but with sufficient signposts seen for respite, planning,  
and regathering of energy  
to fare forward on the way. (in Schuman, 1978, p. 6)*

The qualities of struggle as the learning process, inquiry, rigour, and the ‘matrix of ideas’ all resonate strongly with my own sense of what happens in my practice as both theatre-maker and teacher. Heathcote’s friend, colleague, and advocate, Gavin Bolton, sums up the core principles that he learnt from her work as:

- Drama is about making significant meaning.
- Drama operates best when a whole class together shares that meaning making.
- The teacher’s responsibility is to *empower* and the most useful way of doing this is for the teacher to play a facilitating role. ... The regular teacher/student relationship is laid aside for that of colleague/artists. [His emphasis]

(Heathcote & Bolton, 1995, p. 4)

Heathcote’s work was largely classroom-based (although she worked with groups outside of traditional classroom settings too), and she actively resisted the idea of performing for an audience. Nevertheless, Heathcote’s ideas as expressed above, which see the teacher as a co-creator and facilitator of meaning-making, and an evoker of knowledge, have served to strongly influence both my teaching practice and my collaborative theatre-making practice.

My own collaborative theatre-making practice does not actually fall within the definition of either Drama in Education, or Theatre in Education. Rather, it occupies an uneasy, liminal space; while I am making theatre that is made by adults, for an adult audience, and which does not necessarily have a clear educational goal, I am making this theatre in an educational setting, at a University, and a large part of what I do is about using my theatre-making practice as a space in which I am both teaching and learning. While the rehearsal room is not a lecture room, it can still be considered a teaching space, even though we are

not involved in consciously teaching any particular subject area or topic from the curriculum<sup>69</sup>.

In his ground-breaking essay *Performance Studies: Interventions and Radical Research* (2002), Dwight Conquergood discusses at length the type of knowledge that a study of performance can engender, through contrasting it against the more traditional ways in which knowledge is constituted in the academy:

The dominant way of knowing in the academy is that of empirical observation and critical analysis from a distanced perspective: 'knowing that' and 'knowing about.' This is a view from above the object of inquiry; knowledge that is anchored in paradigm and secured in print. This propositional knowledge is shadowed by another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection: 'knowing how' and 'knowing who'. This is a view from the ground level, in the thick of things. This is knowledge that is anchored in practice and circulated within a performance community, but is ephemeral. (2002, p. 146)

To me, this is important in understanding the nature of the teaching and learning that happens within the process of collective meaning-making which my collaborative theatre-making practice embraces. In some ways, in fact, the whole of this study is an attempt to transfer the second kind of knowledge, generated by process and experience, into the first kind of knowledge, which can be disseminated in this thesis. Conquergood goes on to explain that performance studies (which is where I would situate my own work) creates a radical new kind of knowledge:

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<sup>69</sup> The position of the students involved in the *FrontLines* Project was different in terms of how the production fitted into their curriculum; for some students, they were marked on their work in the project, while for others it was simply a voluntary project that they had chosen to take on. This was determined by the course structure at each of the different Universities involved.

The performance studies project makes its most radical intervention, I believe, by embracing *both* written scholarship *and* creative work, papers and performances. ...[This] manifests itself most powerfully in the struggle to live betwixt and between theory and theatricality, paradigms and practices, critical reflection and creative accomplishment. Performance studies brings this rare hybrid into the academy, a commingling of analytical and artistic ways of knowing that unsettles the institutional organisation of knowledge and disciplines. (2002, p. 151)

Thus, we can understand the type of knowledge produced by the teaching and learning that takes place within the collaborative theatre-making process to be “complex, finely nuanced meaning that is embodied, tacit, intoned, gestured, improvised, coexperienced, covert” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 146). This is the kind of knowing that this thesis is trying to make clear and understand, but it is almost impossible to explain what each person involved in the project was able to both teach and learn during the process. Rather, we are able to sift the data to generate an understanding of a number of different types of teaching and learning that took place within the project as a whole, after which it is possible to posit a theoretical understanding of why teaching and learning can happen within the space of my collaborative theatre-making practice.

### *Teaching and Learning in the FrontLines Project.*

As I have already explained, the types of teaching and learning that I have identified in the *FrontLines* Project arose out of a close reading of the data, aimed at uncovering all the different ways in which my participants and I spoke about what and how we had taught and learnt in the process of making the theatrical work. Like most practitioners who are steeped in the thinking of Drama and Theatre in Education, and who have years of experience in teaching and learning in both Drama and Theatre, I know instinctively that I am never only teaching one thing, or working on one level of learning. Like most of my colleagues, I know ‘in my bones’ that what my students learn from their time in the lecture hall, in the

rehearsal room, in the green room<sup>70</sup>, in the wings, and on the stage itself, far outstrips the mere learning of 'how to act'. The nature of the dramatic form, the way that it engages with multiple modes of expression and multiple intelligences, makes for learning that is complex, multi-layered, and embodied. Elizabeth Ellsworth provides a useful description of the kind of learning that I believe that drama and theatre can create:

Learning never takes place in the absence of bodies, emotions, place, time, sound, image, self-experience, history. It always detours through memory, forgetting, desire, fear, pleasure, surprise, re-writing. And, because learning always takes place in relation, its detours take us up to and sometimes across the boundaries of habit, recognition, and socially constructed identities within ourselves. Learning takes us up to and across the boundaries between ourselves and others and through the place of culture and the time of history. (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 55)

With this in mind, let us therefore move on to consider the types of learning that were evidenced in the *FrontLines* Project.

### *1. Teaching and Learning through Content*

At the most basic level, the actual material that we used to construct the *FrontLines* Project (as discussed in Section 1) operated as a means of teaching and learning. All of the student participants noted the fact that their involvement in the project had allowed them to expand their knowledge of history and world events. Partly this was because of their grappling with the text of the production itself, and partly it was because Tamar, Marié-

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<sup>70</sup> The Green Room is the name given to the communal space in every theatre that is set aside for cast and crew to relax, perhaps have refreshments, and chat, in between their scenes on stage. In my experience, the Green Room is often the site of impassioned debate, hilarious mischief, and more often than not, complete boredom.

Heleen, and I worked hard to contextualise each moment of the production for the students. We spent an enormous amount of time talking students through the historical events that were represented in each letter and each piece of spoken text, and this helped them to understand not only how to speak their text, but also the time and place in which that piece of text originated. Brandon and Kamini talked about this type of learning:

*KAMINI: I learned a lot about history! Because I didn't do history in school, and **FrontLines** just, in a weird way, I think it's improved different areas of my work. Even in theory, because I have a new acknowledgment of the history that's gone before me... So it's had a lasting impact in that way.*

*BRANDON: Ja ... I mean, for me it really improved my knowledge on the atrocities that are happening all the way around the world. I mean, before **FrontLines** I only really knew about the Holocaust, as being one thing. I didn't know that they were the other genocides. Rwanda and the other ones as well, Bosnia, and that I learned through **FrontLines**, and really started forming my own opinions on them, and it sparked my interest in that whole side of human nature.*

This teaching and learning was reinforced by our use of images; as I have said before, one of the most significant parts of the rehearsal process every time we have done *FrontLines* was the day we allowed the cast to sit in the auditorium and see the images that were projected behind them on the stage. During this, Tamar and I would stop the projections often to explain, contextualise, or comment on the images that the students were seeing.

Another aspect of teaching and learning that arises out of the content of the work lay in the types of stories we chose to tell. Students were acutely aware of the fact that we had chosen to tell stories about our own families, and many of them saw the work as an act of memory. Lauren commented on the importance for her of *"realising that bigger stories are actually not what interest me, it is more the personal stuff in history that I am so intrigued by"*. Many of the students commented on the fact that because the material came from real people, and represented real experiences they felt a responsibility to, as Kamini put it *"honour the story"*; she went on to explain that



*it gave me a deeper appreciation for art itself, that these voices won't be lost as long as we continue to make work. ... the content taught me that everything needs a truth to it when you make work.*

This sense of needing to speak truthfully and with sincerity the words of other real people, and for their performance to be an act of memory stood out in the data, and seemed to be a large part of what the student participants had retained from the project.

Thus, it is clear that while we may not have chosen the material that made up the production for educational reasons, but rather artistic ones, the choices we made did in fact operate on the level of teaching. Students were able to learn from the material that they had to perform, and from the contextual understanding that we helped them to build through our directing practice.

## *2. Teaching and Learning Professional Skills and Performance Techniques*

Quite obviously, when we are making a piece of theatre with students who are specialising in drama and theatre, a large part of what we are doing is teaching theatre skills and techniques. While a production like the *FrontLines* Project is not necessarily part of the curriculum, it is nevertheless a powerful space in which to teach and learn about how theatre works. Much of this teaching and learning is based on the idea of experiential learning; we learn (and teach) by doing. The teaching of technique is largely based on repetition, and grinding hard work, as I remarked to Tamar:

*I think that that's where it comes in, is that we are still teaching. So with those kinds of scenes that are very hard to direct, it's because we have to do them again and again and again, because we are actually teaching technique, and technique is only taught through repetition and through trial and error and through them actually getting it wrong before they get it right.*

Thus, even though our primary role was to ‘get the production on its feet’, there was an awareness in us that every moment of our work on the text, or the movement, or the singing, was also a moment of teaching the skills students need for a career in the performing arts.

I was also acutely aware of teaching technical skills like Stage Management. As I explained to Tamar in my RSI,

*I think stage management is a skill that is not taught. And so it is a dying art, certainly in this country. So for me it is very important to pass those skills on because actually there is work in it and it's a livelihood, and all productions need somebody who can do this.*

For me, the learning of the students who are involved on the technical or Stage Management teams of a production is as important as the learning of those who will appear on the stage. Both Brandon and Devaksha were involved as Stage Managers for at least one of the iterations of the show, and they spoke at length about the importance of this experience. For Brandon, it meant the beginning of a lasting career – he now travels throughout South Africa and abroad, working as a crew member and Stage Manager for large-scale productions. For Devaksha, while she has not continued to be involved in Stage Management, the experience was an important one; as she commented “*when you do Stage Management you learn. Stage Management taught me through **FrontLines** to respect the crew immensely*”. Despite her misgivings about the amount of time I spent on teaching them, Marié-Heleen also commented on the fact that many of the students who had been involved in the Stage Management and technical crew in Pretoria had gone on to technical careers in theatre and film.

Another interesting point that arose from both Brandon and Devaksha’ experiences was that although they were initially included in the *FrontLines* Project as Stage Managers, they later became performers in the piece. They were not the only ones whose journey in the project followed a similar trajectory; there were a number of other students who moved

from crew to performer. For both of them, this allowed them to engage a number of different skills sets, and for them to learn more broadly about both the technical and the performative aspects of the theatre-making process. The fact that they were allowed to 'evolve' and grow into a different role within the project was significant for both of them.

The student participants spoke extensively about the range of professional skills they had learnt; Nhlakanipho, for example, spoke of the importance of learning a large volume of lines, commenting that *"It helped me a lot. I think it made it easy for me to learn Shakespeare"<sup>71</sup>. Not necessarily because the text was the same, it wasn't, but the depth and the amount of words".* Many of the students talked about the difficulties in speaking some of the text, because it was so graphic and upsetting, and how handling such pieces of text had helped to improve their interpretive skills. In addition, because the performance itself was multi-modal, using text, music, singing and dance, students were called upon to expand their skills in multiple ways. As Brandon put it *"I loved it though, because I got to learn so much about myself, so much about my body, so much about my performing..."*.

Another significant part of their professional learning came about as a result of working in different spaces. While the rehearsal room was where most of the innovation of the piece took place, many of the students also pointed to the importance of working in a large, professionally-run theatre space like the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre. For many of the student participants, this was their first experience of this kind of proscenium-arch theatre, as Devaksha explained:

*Never had I worked behind the scenes in a theatre like the Sneddon. You know, just something silly like wearing those headphones, and communicating with each other, about okay, this slide's going to go, this fly bar's going to go – I mean*

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<sup>71</sup> Nhlakanipho has successfully played Othello a number of times in Think Theatre's annual Shakespeare production aimed at school audiences.

*that magnitude; in that regard, it made me have the confidence to say I can work in theatre like this, if I wanted to...*

While Devaksha's experience leaned heavily towards learning how the technical aspects of the building worked, other students spoke about the learning they gained just by working on different stages (each of the iterations was in a different theatre aside from *FrontLines: The Remix*, which also took place in the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre). There was also much mention made of the moments that happened in the wings; often, what is happening offstage is as important as what happens onstage, although, as Kamini wryly observed "*backstage is backstage*". In a way, the wings are a different world, a liminal space, and what happens there is often unconnected to what is happening on the stage. It is clear that for many of the students, the moments spent in the wings, waiting for an entrance, or watching someone else perform, or even just finishing an assignment while they waited, were also productive in terms of their learning.

Another important aspect of the professional learning that students underwent in the project arose out of the experience of working with more than one director. This is not the usual or conventional way of doing things in the theatre, and it is clear that for many of the students, they found great value in the experience. Nhlakanipho (who was in the first two iterations of *FrontLines*, as well as *FrontLines: The Remix*, but who was not in the production in Pretoria), summed this up, saying,

*I was working with the two same directors in the first two and a different director in the third one. So I got to see and get a feel of how directors work differently. So I feel it grew me as an artist, and a person who's able to take direction from all sorts of personalities now. It grew me but at the same time it made me realise what type of people I don't want to work with<sup>72</sup>.*

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<sup>72</sup> I will return to this idea later in this chapter, when I discuss the teaching and learning in *FrontLines: The Remix*.

To me, this is very important; for the students, the experience of working with directors who are working collaboratively was a positive learning experience, and one from which they could clearly recognise what they had gained.

### *3. Teaching and Learning Life Skills*

In addition to the teaching and learning of performance and theatre skills, the experience of any theatre production work is almost always going to allow the participants to gain a range of what we can call 'life skills'. These are the things that come up most often in discussions of the value of doing production work in an educational setting; as Stephen Sachs points out

Rehearsing a play teaches young people teamwork, collaboration, tolerance, the importance of listening to and following direction. They learn about problem-solving, discipline, goal-setting, and time management. And they discover that getting something significant accomplished can also be fun. (Sachs, 2018)

While Sachs' comment was made in describing the High School students who had begun the 'Never Again' movement after the school shooting at Marjorie Stoneman Douglas High school in Florida, the data showed that the student participants in the *FrontLines* Project had found themselves gaining similar skills.

Students talked about a range of what could be called life skills, rather than theatre skills, that their involvement in the project had helped them to develop. These included skills such as empathy, assertiveness, respect for others, time management, self-belief, and confidence. Almost all the students talked in various ways about these skills and how the project had helped to develop them. Lauren, for example, spoke of how her involvement in the *FrontLines* Project had helped her to be more confident about mounting her own large productions in her work as a school drama teacher, saying "*It's made me more trusting in my own talents, I guess*". Both Kamini and Devaksha talked about how the project had

helped them to become more assertive. All the students spoke about the fact that the very tight timeframes under which we worked had taught them a great deal about how to manage their time, and how to work better under pressure. The students all spoke of the importance of feeling a sense of empathy for the people whose words they were speaking; as Nhlakanipho put it *“in a way [it] kind of puts you in their shoes, and those aren’t really the type of shoes you want to be wearing”*.

Kamini commented on two key areas of life skills learning; firstly, she spoke at length about the quality of *“sincerity”* in the work, and how important she had found this, saying *“whatever work I do, I still approach it, even if it is a comedy, to give it that sincerity”*. Secondly, and possibly more importantly, she talked about the way in which being part of the project had impacted her work, saying *“**FrontLines** gave me a better work ethic”*. This was just one of the ways that the students indicated that they had learned to extend themselves and challenge themselves through their engagement in the project; Nhlakanipho explained that,

*I think it made me look at my work more deeply, have more depth in it, because before I think I just did things because I knew I could do them and I was good at them. And then after **FrontLines**, everything I did, I tried to find meaning in, and I made sure that once I’m done doing it, I could look back and say “I don’t think I would have done it any better, and I’ve put so much work into it”.*

For both Kamini and Nhlakanipho, there was a clear sense that their involvement in the project had had a positive effect on their attitude to their own work. Nhlakanipho then went on to say,

*It made me less shallow as a human being. It made me more mature as a person, because there’s more to life than your own story, and unfortunately sometimes your story, it might be the least interesting, because there’s the people who fought so that your story could live. So I think it changed me in a sense of looking at things differently ....*

This is profoundly important learning, and clearly has had a lasting effect on his life. This is not something that Tamar and I set out consciously to teach, but the fact that this kind of learning happened within the project is an important part of understanding the educational impact of the project as a whole.

#### *4. Teaching and Learning from Each Other*

One of the most important reasons that the *FrontLines* Project evolved in the first place was because Tamar and I wanted to bring our students, from DUT and UKZN respectively, together to work collaboratively. Each of these student bodies came to the process with their own strengths and weaknesses, and their own ways of doing things. The same thing happened when we took the production to Pretoria; each of the groups of students brought their own learning, knowledge, and skills to the process. As we have already seen, there was initially distrust and some nervousness, as well as a sense of wanting to show each other what they could do. In every case, we found that this disappeared very quickly, as the students were thrown into the pressurized process of making the theatrical work.

All of the student participants that I interviewed spoke at length about the importance of what they had learnt from each other in the *FrontLines* Project. It is clear that students benefitted from the exposure the project gave them to people with different skills sets, different approaches, and different creative processes. Partly this was a result of the fact that we had students who specialised in acting, dance, and music, all working together in a collaborative creative space. In addition, we also had a cast made up of students at very different stages of their training, ranging from first-year students, all the way up to post-graduate, Masters-level students. On the other hand, it was also partly because the students were forced to engage with people whose training and learning processes were very different from their own. This allowed them to embrace different ways of seeing, thinking, and performing, and allowed them to extend their skills by teaching and learning from each other in a process of “mutual appropriation” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 3). As Kamini

put it *"It was almost like a classroom feeling that we'd sit around and we were getting to know one another, and we were also learning from each other..."*.

To provide an example of this, Kamini and Brandon both spoke about how they had improved their physical performance and dance skills, mostly by working with other cast members who were more skilled in these areas. I have quoted their conversation with Tamar and I at length here, because it goes to the heart of this type of learning:

KAMINI: *It was also the cast's willingness to teach you and not mock you and just give you the chance ... they had that understanding ...*

TANYA: *So that sense of learning from each other?*

KAMINI: *Yes ...*

BRANDON: *I think I've become a lot more comfortable in my own body , having done the physical work in Pretoria and I think I was really forced to start looking at myself and my own body and how it moves in space, and I think I have got a greater appreciation for how my body moves in space, and I feel a lot more comfortable moving on stage and also have a great awareness of myself within space, because my body has always been the one thing that hasn't really translated, hasn't really jelled with what my voice is doing. So, I felt that it really helped me to form that connection between the two of them.*

KAMINI: *Well, I learned, I'd say the choreography was a challenge but, working with someone who's not insulting you and who's willing to go through it again and again, gives you a chance to get there. Or to try and get there.*

TANYA: *So there's a safe space in which to fail?*

KAMINI: *Yeah ... and it was, it was nice to have people like that, who weren't rolling their eyes at you, or judging the way you move. I found that with all the **FrontLines** casts, there was never any judgment ...*

BRANDON: *I think it pushes you to do your best, I mean, like watching somebody like [anonymous student], who was a phenomenal dancer.*

KAMINI: *He soared!*

BRANDON: *...he had such an awareness of his body. You look at him and you*



*just, you want to get better. You want to hone your own skills so you can get to the point where you can just fly around the stage like he was. And that's the joys of working in collaboration, that you see people like that and you become inspired ...*

TAMAR: *And also his willingness to then share that with you?*

BRANDON: *Absolutely!*

While this conversation was mainly concerned with their experience of working with other students in the Pretoria version of the production, Lauren and Devaksha had also spoken of the impact that the DUT students' sense of physicality had on them in the first iteration of the project. The difference in the training approach between UKZN and DUT was most obvious in this aspect of the work, as the DUT students were far more confident and accomplished in their physical, embodied approach, while the UKZN students' more theoretical, text-based work gave them greater facility in handling the spoken text. Nhlakanipho picked up on this when he explained that

*I learned different ways of delivering text. From purely on how people were raised, there's different ways that we speak, and therefore different ways in which we recite text, because of how we were raised. So having learnt the different ways that people were reciting and delivering lines, purely from how a person talks, it makes me realise what they went through...*

This kind of learning allowed the students to expand their own skills in ways that had little to do with their 'classroom' learning; rather this learning arose out of their close observation of each other's ways of doing and being, that allowed them to both give and take from each other. In many ways, this learning shifted students' perspectives, and changed the way they approached their work after the *FrontLines* Project. Nhlakanipho touched on this when he commented that "*When we went back to our [respective campuses] we actually started learning things differently and wanting to do things differently, because of what we have learned from the other [students]*".

A lot of this mutual appropriation was facilitated by the strong sense of ensemble that the cast had developed. All of the student participants spoke about the importance of this sense of working as an ensemble, with no student feeling more important than any other; as Lauren explained *“There was no one that stood out as a star... you never felt like there was someone who was above you in terms of status”*. This seems to have been important; because there was a sense of equality, and a sense of all being ‘in the same boat’, students formed strong and lasting bonds and friendships that served to increase their capacity to learn from each other. Interestingly, Nhlakanipho spoke to me about this sense of ensemble and the way that students had bonded with each other as a sort of special ‘club’:

*NHLKANIPHO: Whenever I bump into the people that we worked with, in **FrontLines**, from UKZN, I always feel like: “Hey I went to school...no I didn’t go to school, with those people, I didn’t,” but it feels that way. So I didn’t feel like there was an us and them, I felt like we became one. I felt like **FrontLines** was its own little institution on its own, to be honest, that’s what I felt at the end...*

*TANYA: It has its own separate degree; you got a degree in **FrontLines**.*

*NHLKANIPHO: DUT sure, UKZN, right, now let’s go and study in the school of TnT<sup>73</sup>.*

This intense sense of bonding can be interpreted to understand the *FrontLines* Project as constituting a ‘community of practice’ (Lave & Wenger, 1991) or what John-Steiner calls “a thought community” (2000, p. 119). Within this community, all the members, including Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I, are in a position of both learning and teaching simultaneously, as we share skills, ideas, knowledges and insights through the process of mutual appropriation.

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<sup>73</sup> Many of the students we have worked with over the years have come to refer to Tamar and I by this acronym.

One thing that emerged very strongly out of the students' sense of working as an ensemble was the fact that all their contributions, no matter how small, were valuable. As Lauren put it, *"there are people that put that much effort into not even having a speaking role in that [section of the performance] that can move someone to tears"*. This sense that everything everyone did was valuable, and that they could not rely on a few 'stars' to carry the performance is another important part of what they learnt in the production.

Of course, it was not only the student participants who were teaching and learning from each other. As we saw in Section 2, in working collaboratively, Tamar, Marié-Heleen and I are also engaged in processes of mutual appropriation, where we "learn from each other by teaching what we know" (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 3). Through processes of dialogic thinking and shared discovery, through asking questions and through observation of each other's ways of thinking and doing, we simultaneously teach and learn in a complex interchange of ideas. We do the same with the students we work with; as much as we are teaching them, by operating in an open and collaborative way, and by asking students to bring their own ideas to bear upon the work (see Section 1 for a detailed discussion of this), we are able also to learn from our students, whose own 'funds of knowledge' (Moll, 2014) provide us with a rich source of learning.

While Tamar and I had wanted to bring our students together, and we hoped that we would all learn from each other, we had no way of really controlling what the students would or would not learn from each other. We could not predict at the beginning of the process how the teaching and learning would unfold. Rather, through the project we were able to make a space for this teaching and learning to happen spontaneously and organically. As Lauren succinctly put it, *"You gave us a process, and that was that"*. However, it is also clear that the way in which we approached the collaborative theatre-making process did work in concrete ways to engender this mutual appropriation.

## 5. Teaching and Learning through Agency and Independence

One of the most important parts of my collaborative theatre-making process is the way in which we as the directors approach the task of directing the actual rehearsals. Many directors work from an autocratic, controlling position that determines every single thing that an actor may or may not do on the stage. The feeling in these types of productions is that the director's vision is a rigid 'game plan' that everyone else simply has to fall in with. I cannot imagine anything worse! As I explained in my RSI,

*The people who waltz into a rehearsal room and act like God has put them on the face of the earth to come and, you know, control these people, those kind of people are awful. They are awful to work with and I don't want to work like that, I really don't. So I try not to.*

This is a large part of the shared intention and shared vision behind my collaborative theatre-making practice; I want to work in ways that allows all the people involved in a production to be able to "*bring their own talent, their own insights, their own ideas, their own prejudices*" to the process, in order for us to be able to share and learn from each other, and produce a piece of theatre that is 'greater than the sum of the parts'.

Behind this approach lies a clear educational intention; as Tamar pointed out, in all our production work, the unspoken teaching intention is about giving students a sense of agency, and a sense of empowerment through the work:

*I think we both have very strong methodological ways, and a desire to empower, to allow the students to discover for themselves. And I think that's something we share. So there's never any kind of question about saying okay, well the students are capable of doing this, so we give them the power, we entrust them with space.*

It is clear from the data that students were aware of this process, and that those that I interviewed all felt that this sense of having "*the freedom to express how we wanted to do*

*things*” as Lauren put it. All of the student participants indicated that that they had felt like collaborators in the process, and that we had, as Nhlakanipho put it, “*welcomed our own talents*” into the process.

This was an important aspect of our approach. The students indicated that they felt that their talents were appreciated and extended by the collaborative process. Lauren expanded on this idea, saying:

LAUREN: *One of the things I feel that you and Tamar were very good at was, you knew that someone like me had administration stuff that was a strength of mine... so a lot of that sort of admin came my way and that was nice because, it kind of showed that your directors are looking not only as a performer, you’re looking at people as...*

TANYA: *You’re not just a body on a stage.*

LAUREN: *Ja, you’re looking at people as three dimensional.*

By fostering a sense of openness in the process, and by asking students to bring their ideas and talents to bear upon the work we were doing, we were able to allow students to access the wide range of their abilities.

This sense of allowing students to explore and expand their talents meant that we could not pre-determine everything that was going to happen. Rather, we had to, at times, ‘take our hand from the rudder’, so to speak, and allow the piece to develop organically. Many of the students spoke at length about how important this had been for them. As Brandon put it,

*I think we all had some part to play in some way, whether it be providing some of the content or being involved in creating something with the content that we had. I think we were left open to our own devices to a certain extent in that we could have a say in what the final product would look like at the end. ...I love being challenged, and I love having a say in what the final product would look*

*like. I don't like coming into a process where it's like – okay, this what the final product is going to be. This is how we did it, and it's done. I'd rather have a say on how it develops ... the final product is a development of our own, of the collaboration between all of us, whether it be the director and all of us as well. I enjoyed that.*

The student participants used words such as 'openness', 'freedom', and 'fun' in describing the process. This was reflected in the fact that we often allowed students to solve their own problems with the material. As discussed in Section 1 and 2, Tamar and I tend to remove ourselves from the position of being 'the one who knows', and rather work through a more intuitive, questioning approach to help the students to find their own way of doing things. As Kamini explained

*I think it was directing that allowed you to explore your own, your way, how you approached it. We were never told how to approach the piece. It was only towards the end that we'd get notes about, you know, say it like this, or try and say it softer here, but we were allowed that space to, while learning lines just to try, to keep trying, which was quite nice. And we were just guided towards the end.*

This sense of having agency and power over the work that they were doing, that they were active co-creators and makers of meaning, comes across very strongly in the data as one of the most positive aspects of the project.

A significant aspect of this freedom and agency lay in our tendency to remove ourselves from the rehearsal room at times, as discussed in Section 1 of this thesis. This practice of 'stepping out' of the rehearsal space is something we have called "teaching through absence" (Meskin & van der Walt, 2015). In stepping out of the rehearsal space, we made it possible for students to work independently of us, and to engage with both problem finding and problem solving processes. Because we took ourselves out of the room, we removed any sense of being 'the one who knows', and allowed students the freedom to take responsibility for their own learning process. Those that really engaged with the task at

hand got more out of it than those who sat back and waited to be told what to do. Because we were not micro-managing the creative process, this provided a space for students to control their own learning and personal development processes. Nhlakanipho summed up the importance of this process for him, saying *“if it was a way if studying, I think I would be a doctor right now; because you would leave it to me, and its either sink or swim. I don’t think anyone would allow themselves to sink”*.

## *6. Learning through Watching Each Other*

As we have already seen, a large component of the teaching and learning that took place in the project came from each other. An important part of this teaching and learning from each other came about through the process of observing each other at work. For Tamar and I, there is a strong awareness that what we do and how we work in the rehearsal room and in the theatre space, act as teaching mechanisms. Tamar and I discussed this in my interview with her:

*TAMAR: I mean we’ve spoken about it before, is the idea of what you are modelling, and what they are learning not just from what we are saying and what we are doing theatrically...*

*TANYA: But just how we work.*

*TAMAR: But the actual, the idea of seeing the nature of the collaboration itself acts as a learning metaphor in a way, which is a kind of interesting thing.*

*TANYA: I think it is. The idea of watching us was a learning experience.*

Many of the students I interviewed agreed that they had learnt an enormous amount, simply by watching Tamar, Marié-Heleen and I working together. Such aspects of the working process as our ways of handling disputes or arguments (see Section 2), our own emotional connection to the work itself, and the way that we each used our different skills sets and knowledges within the collaborative process, all seemed to serve as teaching moments for the students.

For many of the students, the way in which we handled conflict in the rehearsal space was significant. As we saw in Section 2, we work in a way that does not demand consensus, and we often disagree. Many of the students commented on the fact that they learnt a lot simply from watching us handle these moments of disagreement. A significant part of this was the fact that we tend to work out our differences **in** the rehearsal room; as Devaksha said “*you guys actually worked it out in front of us*”. It is clear that for the students, watching us handle our disagreements in front of them, allowed them to understand healthy ways of dealing with conflict. Despite our differences of opinion, as far as the students were concerned we still presented them with a unified, cohesive vision. I spoke to Lauren and Devaksha about this:

TANYA: *Did you feel like we had cohesive vision?*

DEVAKSHA: *Yes.*

LAUREN: *Yes, definitely.*

TANYA: *It's interesting, because sometimes we didn't. There were definitely days where I walked out thinking we want two different things here, and she says the same thing, so it's interesting that it came across to you as being cohesive.*

LAUREN: *I think that's so important. I think that it shows that you have control over your own production, for the fact that you guys never showed that aspect...*

Our agreement to disagree over certain matters allowed students to see the collaborative process in action, as we struggled with ourselves and with each other.

All of the student participants spoke about how important our emotional connection to the work was for them; as Devaksha and Lauren pointed out:

DEVAKSHA: *But I think along with the vision, I think from the very beginning everyone involved was very aware of how very deeply passionate you are and were about ...*

LAUREN: *...and personal...*

DEVAKSHA: *...and in fact it was personal and it was your grandfather's*



*letters...That deep passion, I mean we knew that this was like a baby to you guys...*

Because we were open about our own commitment to the piece from the very start, because the students were acutely aware of how personally connected we felt to the work, we were able to model for them this quality of passionate commitment and connection. When Nhlakanipho talked about what he had learnt from the project, he spoke of learning to *“love your work, understand your work, and love the project that you are doing, so that you can be able to portray that emotion through your actors and your staff”*.

In terms of learning through watching us use our different skills sets and knowledges, in my own case an important part of this was the work I did with the technical crews of the project. In each of the three iterations that Tamar and I were responsible for, I also took on the task of ‘calling’ the cues for the show in performance<sup>74</sup>. The reasons for doing this were somewhat pragmatic (I have years of experience in ‘calling’ cues, and with a show of this complexity, it needed experience and calm), as well as educational (in watching me call the show, and working with me as sound, lighting and visual technicians, the students were able to observe and learn the correct way to go about calling a show). Brandon mentioned that one of his key lessons learned was *“how to call a show”*, as he had worked as the Stage Manager for *FrontLines: The Remix*, and I had spent much time with him, teaching him the

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<sup>74</sup> To ‘call’ the show means to have absolute control over all the lighting cues, sound cues, visual cues, scenery changes, the ‘flying’ in and out of scenery and cloths or curtains, and the movement of the stage floor itself (in large venues). For each of these changes, the Stage Manager gives a standby call, and then a ‘Go’ call at the appropriate moment. The technicians responsible for each of these different aspects are expected to follow the Stage Manager absolutely, and only ‘go’ when told to. It is a task that requires a methodical, calm approach, and a laser-like focus, as one often has to call up to five cues at the same time. Calling even one of these at the wrong time can not only ruin the illusion of the performance, but can also be extremely dangerous, and so this is a vitally important role in any theatrical production.

art of controlling all the moving parts of the show in performance. While I did not actually ‘call’ this particular iteration of the project, it was clear that Brandon had benefitted greatly from the learning that had developed out of our work together.

Thus, in watching us work, students could learn about ways of directing and making a performance, ways of working collaboratively, ways of relating to your work with passion and commitment, ways of having fun while you work, ways of negotiating disagreement and conflict, ways of supporting your collaborators both technically and emotionally, and ways of bringing your own talents and abilities to bear on collaborative work.

## *7. Teaching and Learning through Process*

When setting out to create a new work of theatre, in the form of the *FrontLines* Project, there was no conscious decision on the part of Tamar and I that we were going to be teaching about devising. While we are always aware that in any production-based work that we do with students we are involved in teaching a wide range of skills, we did not set out with a particular aim of teaching about the process of making a theatrical work. However, for many of the students involved, the *FrontLines* Project was their first experience of devising a theatrical work. Many of the students I interviewed spoke about how important the experience of the process of making a new work of theatre was in terms of their learning. Devaksha summed this up best when she said “*I learnt a lot in class, but you actually learn by doing. You learn by experience, and having **FrontLines** with everyone was a massive learning experience...*”.

An important aspect of this ‘learning by doing’ was that their involvement in the *FrontLines* Project allowed students to understand what they are capable of doing in a short space of time. As Lauren and Devaksha put it

LAUREN: Yes, I think it made a lot seem more possible than it would have before doing it. In terms of when we did the first **FrontLines**...we had...what was it, three weeks? Three and a half weeks.... And yet it worked somehow, which is kind of amazing and I think, knowing that I was going to one day be in charge of big productions like this, because of my teaching, it kind of made everything seem okay, so what I would have previously run around like a headless chicken for, now I can approach things and often say to my kids, it's okay, I've done a production and it was three weeks' worth of work and we managed to do a three-hour play!

DEVAKSHA: It was a huge sense of accomplishment ...

LAUREN: Ja absolutely!

DEVAKSHA: ... that we could do this, individually and as a group.

This sense of achievement was clearly empowering for the students, and they all evidenced a strong sense of pride in what they had achieved in terms of what Devaksha called “*the magnitude, the size of it, and what I accomplished*”. Because the process of making the *FrontLines* Project allowed students to explore the range of their talents, they felt a greater sense of being, as Kamini put it “*more involved...more hands on*”. Their sense of having a say in the work that we were making, and their understanding that each of them brought something unique to the process, is significant.

Both Lauren and Brandon spoke at length about the ways in which their involvement in the *FrontLines* Project had influenced their own devising work. Lauren spoke of her learning during the project, and the way it had directly impacted on the devised work she made not long after *FrontLines*, saying “*I think it was definitely a learning experience and what was so nice was that we could have a process and a production as big as **FrontLines** to actually – not imitate – but [our] process was definitely in imitation of*”. Brandon expand upon this by talking about the ways he had used the *FrontLines* devising process as a kind of ‘way in’ to his own devised work:

*I think it's influenced me in so many different ways, just the collaboration process and how to put together the show and everything like that. It gave me that way into [my] show, that I was looking for, for quite a while. It's a very accessible process in that, anybody can do it really.*

Thus, the skills that the students were able to test and master during the *FrontLines* Project were then carried over into their own creative processes, as they began to make their own devised theatrical works.

Some of the students I interviewed spoke about the *FrontLines* Project as a “journey” that they had been on with us, and which they had found to be transformative in some way. Within the safe space of the rehearsal room, and from their position as co-constructors of meaning, and co-creators of the performance, “*some people were changed in the process*”, as Nhlakanipho explains; “*some people went through a transformation where they were like ‘it’s just another play man’, but the more we did it, it meant something to us*”. For many of the students, the making of the *FrontLines* Project had changed them, and this was reflected in their deep sense of commitment to the project, and the fact that they felt that their learning from the project had had a lasting effect on them.

## **8. Teaching and Learning through Repetition**

One of the most interesting findings from the data is that fact that almost all my respondents felt that the fact that there were many iterations of the *FrontLines* Project provided a greater scope for teaching and learning. Again and again in my conversations with my respondents, they talked about the importance to them of being able to, as Nhlakanipho put it “*own my pieces from the [first iteration], and perform them better, and better my performance*”. For most of my respondents, the second iteration, performed at the Courtyard Theatre in 2010, was their favourite. Lauren explained that

*...for the same cast to come back for the second one, showed that obviously we*

*wanted to improve. So having the second one being so much more polished and ready for performance, where we actually stepped on to the stage feeling so much more confident than we did after three and a half weeks in the first one. So I think definitely the second one. It just, it worked better, and also I think again we knew each other's strengths and weaknesses now, so like now it wasn't a case of it was DUT and UKZN, now the second one it was just us in **FrontLines** and I think that was so much easier.*

For the student participants, the chance to come back to the piece, and improve on their performance, by working on their mistakes, and applying what they had learnt from the project the first time around, was a very important part of their learning.

Kamini was in fact the only student out of the whole *FrontLines* cast who performed in each of the four different versions, and so I chose specifically to interview her for this study. I felt that she would have a different perspective to many of the other students that I interviewed, and so I was intrigued by her response when I asked her how her experience had changed from one iteration to the next:

*In the beginning, it was a trying and you know, it was new and it was fun and exciting, but at the same time you felt a bit lost sometimes, and like I said I didn't get to know everyone, in the first part ... Ja, but that was also, look it was the first time and I don't know, I guess because we were in such a rush we didn't have time to see the other works, or like absorb it. We just were trying to learn and get it on ... get it on! But the second one was when it really seeped in and I think the space added to it as well because The Courtyard was a lot smaller than Sneddon. I think it affected the audience a lot more, and it was also really nice to work with everyone at DUT, we went from UKZN to DUT<sup>75</sup>. It was nice to work in that*

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<sup>75</sup> The first iteration of the project had been largely rehearsed at UKZN's Howard College Campus. The following year, we rehearsed largely at DUT's campus, since the production was mounted at the Courtyard Theatre at DUT.

*rehearsal room with the mirrors around it. It was almost like a classroom feeling that we'd all sit around and we were getting to know one another, and we were also learning from each other, it had a deeper impact. I think the group in the second **FrontLines**, the DUT group, were phenomenal, like those people are still, you can see that everyone who worked there, really worked, have gone so far now ...*

*And then **FrontLines: The Remix** ...I felt that we weren't trying so much anymore, we were just waiting to be told what to do. **Remix**, it was, we were still getting along, but we lost that sense of sincerity and the sense of what it's about.*

*Pretoria lifted it up again for me, because there were also some memorable people who taught you things like [anonymous students] and those people who are willing to give to a piece...*

It is clear that for Kamini, her involvement in the project had evolved from one iteration to the next, and that she had a clear sense of how her involvement in the many phases that the work had gone through, had allowed her to continue to learn and extend her skills.

This sense of learning from the repetition of the project also extended to Tamar and I. From the first iteration, Tamar and I were aware that the production had some serious problems; the cast was too large, and the piece was far too long. In each successive iteration, we have cut both the number of cast members, and the length of the piece, as we have worked to improve the work. Tamar and I spoke of this when I interviewed her, and we reflected on the ways that this experience had helped us to learn:

TAMAR: *Because I think that's the other thing to remember is, I think we look back at it and we have fondness for it, but we also were aware that there were sections of it that were bad.*

TANYA: *Yes.*

TAMAR: *Especially in the first one, and then you just couldn't fix them...*

TANYA: *There was no time to fix them. There was no capacity to fix them.*

TAMAR: *And it was just, it was also a lesson of having to go well...*

TANYA: *There's nothing we can do.*

TAMAR: *There's nothing we can do about it. So it's not like we were going 'oh look, we're so amazing. Everything works beautifully because we've made it work.' We were very aware of the failings of it. And I think that was also something that was a collaborative lesson of going, maybe the end point isn't so much the focus, that if these kids have learnt something from it, then we've done [something good]. I think it's easy to look with rose-coloured glasses and to go yeah, we were fabulous. I think that it wasn't that we didn't make mistakes. We did make mistakes, but I think what we did really well and what we do really well, is we are able to fix the mistakes because we don't hold on to them and we don't get panicked by them and we just, we deal with them. And we're not precious. So we see something [that isn't working] and even if we've spent a lot of time on it and it doesn't work, we're able to say no, it doesn't work.*

TANYA: *Yes. Certainly that first one, there were huge problems with it. But I think that that was the joy of being able to do it again with the same group of people was that we could fix so many of those things.*

TAMAR: *Yes, and I think actually that was such a huge thing to be able to do it again and I often thought about that, not just with **FrontLines** but often I've thought you just start to see what's wrong and then it's finished.*

TANYA: *Yes.*

TAMAR: *Actually it's such an important learning thing ... Because you should never actually see something and think it's perfect. There's always something that you could improve. But the idea of actually being able to put into action the ideas that you wanted to do again, was such a... It was so liberating in a way. And it was so exciting to be able to do that. And I think that was really really a big part of developing that, I think deepening if you like, the collaborative nature of the relationship. Because we could push further and we could be more, we could be deeper, we could be more complex, we could explore more aesthetics. We could just do more things as opposed to just basically, putting the show on its feet.*

TANYA: *Yes, and I think that the fact that there was a gap in between them had also given us the space to...*

TAMAR: *To think.*

The repetition of the production gave us the chance to engage in a hermeneutic cycle of action and reflection, with each version of the production allowing us to solve some of the problems that had arisen in the last. This is certainly reflected in the fact that Tamar and I still consider the project to be 'unfinished' in many ways, and that we have many ideas for further changes and improvements that we could make to it when we eventually return to the project.

### *9. Teaching and Learning from FrontLines: The Remix*

An important aspect of the learning from the repetition of the project also reflected on what we all felt we had learnt from the *FrontLines: The Remix* experience. As I have already discussed (see Section 1), I had no real intention of discussing *The Remix* in this thesis, as I felt so disconnected from the making of that particular iteration of the work. However, in all my interviews with the student participants, and despite my not asking them about it, they spoke at length about their experience in *FrontLines: The Remix*. Interestingly, the students' reflections on the experience largely matched my own private feelings of disappointment and disassociation with the creative process. Students responses reflected that they felt that this particular iteration of the project had, in some way, broken their trust and their sense of community. Many of the students spoke to me, with rage and candour<sup>76</sup>, about their intense feelings of betrayal at the fact that the directors of *FrontLines: The Remix* had not bothered to watch the recording or read the script of our original production. For Tamar and I, this was also an enormous disappointment; we had given our precious project to a group of people that we felt we could trust, and it very quickly became obvious that this trust was misplaced. The three directors had approached us about making something new from our project, and our feeling was that they then did not hold up their side of the bargain.

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<sup>76</sup> Because the students I interviewed felt so strongly, and because they spoke to me with such candour, I have chosen in many cases not to replicate their words here, for ethical reasons.



As we have already seen in Section 2, there was no sense of shared vision between the three *Remix* directors, and Tamar and I. To me, this was the ultimate failure of the endeavour; we were never on the same page, and this reflected in the students' experience. They felt confused by the fact that there was no agreement between the directors and ourselves, and often seemed to feel paralysed. As a result, as Kamini observed "*the cast was less giving of their own ideas... the collaboration fell away*". Many of the students characterised the style of directing in *FrontLines: The Remix* as more authoritarian and hierarchical. They felt that they had limited freedom, and that they weren't "*allowed to play in The Remix*", as Nhlakanipho put it. Students also spoke at length about the fact that they had lost all sense of being an ensemble in *FrontLines: The Remix*. Instead the student participants felt that certain cast members 'had the ear' of the directors, while others were completely ignored. This lack of cohesion was strikingly obvious in watching the students work on this production, and there was a clear undercurrent of tension between cast members.

However, despite the general unhappiness with the production, it nevertheless did serve as a learning opportunity for all of us. As Brandon sagely observed "*Even the worst processes have something of benefit in them*". The students all spoke about the *Remix* experience as a way of learning; as Lauren put it "*in all three of the experiences, we've learnt what to do, and then...very, very starkly... what not to do, which is quite nice actually. And how not to treat people*". She spoke at length about how her experience in *FrontLines: The Remix* had, to some extent, determined what type of director she had become:

*I've never been in a situation where a director has never taken what I have said, and basically not listened. I've never been in a situation like that and it's definitely something that's changed my directing style. I very, very consciously will never ever be authoritarian because, I don't feel that you get the best creative process.*

This echoes the opinions of almost all of the students I interviewed; they felt that it had shown them the kind of theatre-making process that they did not want to engage in, and

the kind of director that they didn't want to be. In being part of the difficult and unhappy process of making *FrontLines: The Remix*, they had learnt valuable and lasting lessons about who they want to be as theatre-makers in their own right.

For Tamar and I, the lessons we learned from the experience were tied up with the risks of allowing other people to come in and take over a work that was, essentially, ours. As Lauren said to me

*[You are] the people who owned this production, and you have every right, your names were on it, you devised, you adapted, you created, and yes it was in collaboration, but without your vision, it wouldn't have been a production....*

The hard lesson we had to grapple with was that, if you chose to open your work up to other people's adaptations, you then have to face the consequences, even if what those other people do with your work makes you very unhappy. The fact that the directors of *The Remix* had not actually watched the recording or read the script of the piece only came to light about three quarters of the way through the rehearsal period, and for my own part I felt that our trust in them had been betrayed. To me, this points to the risks of working with others; sometimes, collaboration works, but in other cases, it can be disastrous. I think that Tamar and I also learnt valuable lessons about our process and way of working, by seeing it in such stark contrast to the way in which the three directors worked with the students. Certainly, we were both very happy to be able to work with Marié-Heleen on the Pretoria version of *FrontLines* after *The Remix*, and in a way, regain control of our production, by working in our own way again. For my own part, the *FrontLines: The Remix* experience was a lesson in the dangers of allowing people I don't know well, and who do not share my theatrical intentions, to work on a project that means so much to me.

## 10. Lasting Teaching and Learning

In interviewing the students involved in the *FrontLines* Project, I had allowed quite some time to elapse between their involvement in the project, and the date of our interview. All of them had since graduated, and moved on to careers in the performing arts, in one way or another. However, despite the intervening passage of time, they could all speak about their involvement in the project with accuracy and vivid recall. To me, this points to the fact that the lessons they learnt in the project are lasting ones, which have helped to shape the creative artists and teachers they are today.

The students all spoke about the value of their realisation that, as Devaksha said *“You’re part of something that is bigger than yourself”*. This sense of the larger importance of the work they did as part of the *FrontLines* Project has carried over into their way of working and being in the world. As we have already seen, students could discuss at length the ‘life skills’ that they learnt from the project, including having a greater maturity, and a more serious approach to the kind of work they wanted to do. For example, Kamini spoke of how she continues to search for the quality of *“sincerity”* in all her work, and strives to *“honour the story”*. Nhlakanipho also spoke of an increased seriousness in his approach, and the fact that his involvement in the project had made him *“more mature as a person”*.

All the students I interviewed saw the production as an important part of their lives. Lauren summed this up, saying,

*I think the production has been so memorable, but so [much] part of our lives, that it would be the kind of thing that if you guys ever had to do it again, you could phone up your old cast, and we would be there, no matter what jobs we were holding, no matter what life was like...*

This points again to the intense sense of ownership and commitment the students have towards the project. Every single student participant I interviewed asked when we were going to do it again, and committed themselves to being a part of the project once more.

All of the students could name a number of moments from the performances that stood out for them, and that they felt had stayed with them. In fact, for almost all of them, the Meditation on The Holocaust was the moment that, as Lauren put it “*will haunt me forever*”. They also spoke of their continuing sense of community, and the lasting friendships that they had made during the project. Nhlakanipho summed this sense of being connected to other people through the project, saying

*...having been a part of **FrontLines**, and having people that you meet with and work with, that you’ve worked with on **FrontLines** before and actually are able to talk about: “Remember when we did this??” is a very wonderful way of reminiscing, and there’s a wonderful time of reminiscing and so I do enjoy that, so I do feel like I’m a part of something...*

To me, this continued sense of community is significant; when Tamar and I originally conceived of the idea of bringing our respective students together, it was with the aim of creating these kinds of links between them. However, what is apparent to me now is that all we did was bring the students together, and create a frame for them to build relationships with each other. While we brought them together, the friendships that they have formed have nothing to do with Tamar and I, and exist independently of us.

## **Conclusions**

Thus, in seeking to understand how my practice of collaborative theatre-making can create a space for teaching and learning, I have been able to identify and describe ten different types of teaching and learning that were present as a part of the *FrontLines* Project. It is clear that the project, although aimed at creating a staged performance, and

falling outside of the traditional classroom learning and the curriculum of the students involved, was a powerful and lasting teaching and learning experience. Nhlakanipho, in summing up his experience as part of the *FrontLines* Project said:

*it's a whole lot of journeys that we went through, with **FrontLines** you know, there's a whole lot of crimes [referring to the content of the work], a whole lot of anger, there's a whole lot of laughter, it was a giant rollercoaster of emotions and having gone through it, changed me in terms of how I approach emotion in life.*

It is clear that, for the students that I interviewed, the experience of being part of the *FrontLines* Project has changed their lives, and made them see the world differently, and I am profoundly proud of that.

The second part of my critical question, however, concerns the 'why?' of this teaching and learning. The next chapter will therefore go on to attempt to build a theoretical understanding of the mechanism behind this teaching and learning, using a Vygotskian frame.

## Chapter 10

### *So, what's Vygotsky got to do with it?*

*"TAMAR: I also remember wanting them to be able to... wanting them to want to go further...I think maybe the expectation of excellence generates excellence, to a degree."*

The name of Lev Vygotsky has already appeared a few times in this thesis, primarily when I have talked briefly about the work of Anastasia Samaras<sup>77</sup>, and in relation to the ideas of Vera John-Steiner<sup>78</sup>. Both would classify themselves as Vygotskian scholars (Samaras & Freese, 2006; Samaras, 2011; John-Steiner, 2000; Connery, John-Steiner, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010), as Vygotsky's ideas form the backbone of their understanding of "the interdependence of social and individual processes in the co-construction of knowledge" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 1). Since their work is so important in terms of both the methodological and theoretical aspects of this study, it is not surprising that my own thinking is also imbedded in Vygotskian thought; Vygotsky's ideas underpin much of the work I have undertaken in this thesis, and will play a large role as I grapple in this Chapter with the reasons **why** my collaborative theatre-making practice creates a space for teaching and learning. Therefore, it is necessary at this point in my thesis to elucidate some of the basic tenets of Vygotsky's thought, and to explain which parts of his broad range of theoretical positions I will be using in generating meaning in my own work.

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<sup>77</sup> In the Methodological Parenthesis, and Chapter 2.

<sup>78</sup> In Chapter 6.

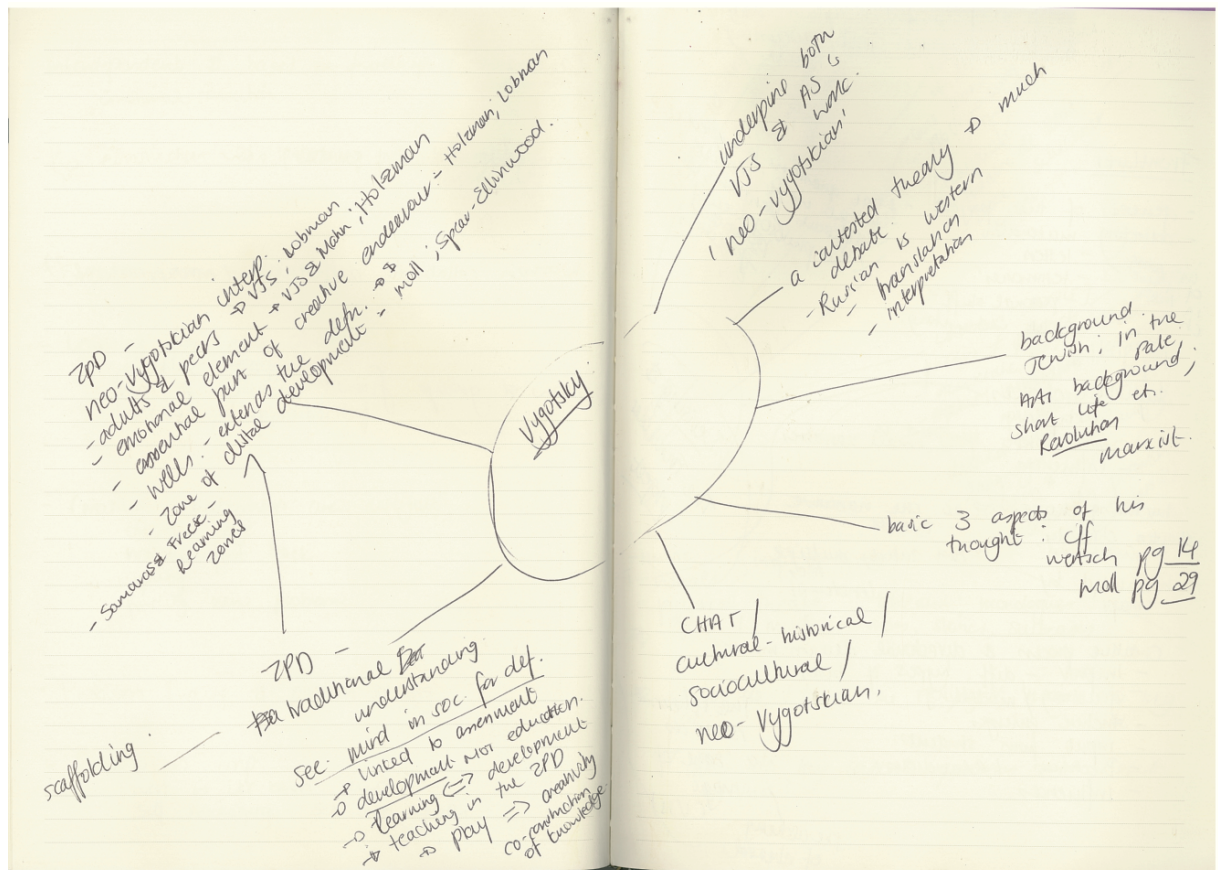


Figure 43: A simple visual map of my thinking about Vygotsky and his ideas.

### A biographical sketch<sup>79</sup>

While this may seem an odd interruption in the flow of my discussion, I believe that it is important to sketch a background to Vygotsky's ideas here. If, through a Vygotskian lens, we understand knowledge to be socially or culturally-historically constructed, then it is

<sup>79</sup> This biographical sketch is based on a number of sources, including Connery, John-Steiner, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010; Moll, 2014; Wertsch, 1985; Van der Veer, 2007 and Luria, 1978. The most detailed insights into Vygotsky's life seem to have come from his daughter, Gita Vygodskaya (1995), whose reminiscences of her father's life have given Vygotskian scholars a valuable insight into his personality and his family life.

important to know the context in which his ideas evolved. Interestingly, every book I have read about Vygotsky and his ideas includes a section about his biography, and this would serve to substantiate the fact that it is important in understanding his work. Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky (1896 – 1934)<sup>80</sup> was born in Orsha<sup>81</sup>, in Byelorussia (now a part of Belarus), to a middle-class, intellectual Jewish family. As secular Jewish intellectuals, the life of the family centred largely on their love for “history, literature, theatre, and art” (Vygodskaya, 1995, p. 2). Despite the strict quotas which governed University entrance for Jews, Vygotsky was accepted at Moscow University, where he initially enrolled to study Medicine (his family’s preference), but quickly changed to Law (both career paths would allow him to practice and live outside of the Jewish Pale). At the same time, he enrolled in classes at the Shanyavsky People’s University, which was not officially sanctioned, where he studied philosophy and the arts. It is clear that Vygotsky flourished in this atmosphere of intellectual ferment, and we know that his interest in psychology as a field began during this period. Vygodskaya quotes her father as saying “... while still at the university, I started a study of psychology and continued through all subsequent years” (1995, p. 4).

Vygotsky graduated from University in 1917, as the Russian Revolution set about changing his world forever. As Van der Veer observes

The October Revolution and the events that followed caused a social havoc that

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<sup>80</sup> Van der Veer (2007) notes that Vygotsky was actually born Lev Semyonovich Vygodksy, but changed his name to Vygotsky while he was a teenager. It is not known why he did this, as all the other members of his family, including his daughters, continued to use the original spelling of the name.

<sup>81</sup> Both Orsha and Gomel, where Vygotsky and his family later lived, fell within what was called the Jewish Pale of Settlement, an area designated by Catherine the Great in 1791, to which Jews were largely restricted. This area was vulnerable to attack by anti-Semitic forces, resulting in the pogroms that periodically spread across the area. We know that Vygotsky himself would have survived two such pogroms during his childhood, in 1903 and 1906 (Moll, 2014; Van der Veer, 2007).



was unprecedented in recent Russian history. Years of both civil and international war plus brutal political repression and 'social reforms' caused a devastation that it will still take Russia many years to recover from. (2007, p. 18)

Shortly after graduating, and in the midst of both World War I and the Russian Revolution, Vygotsky instead returned to Gomel (which was under German occupation at the time), where he initially spent his time nursing his mother and younger brother who had both contracted tuberculosis. It is widely thought that it was in so doing that Vygotsky contracted the disease, which would eventually kill him at the age of 37. When World War I ended, and Russian rule was restored in the area in 1919, Vygotsky took up a post as a teacher<sup>82</sup> and "began to teach literature, aesthetics, philosophy and in the newly opened vocational school, and then psychology and logic in a local teachers college" [also known as a normal school] (Vygodskaya, 1995, p. 5). He also is known to have taught literature and Russian to adults at a number of different institutions locally. It is likely that it was here that his lifelong interest in education and learning began.

It was also during this period in Gomel that Vygotsky began to work in the field that was known in Russia as 'defectology', that is the study of children with learning difficulties of various kinds. His interest in these children and the ways in which they learn also can be seen to have had a significant influence on his later work. While he was engaged in all this varied activity, he continued to teach, and in 1923 set up the first psychological laboratory at the Gomel Normal School. Here he could, with the help of his students, replicate the

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<sup>82</sup> While this would have been impossible in Tsarist Russia, after the Revolution the restrictions placed on Jews were abolished. As van der Veer observes, "In Tsarist Russia, he might have become an excellent lawyer or a beloved general practitioner but no academic career would have been possible" (2007, 18). Whatever he may have felt about the events of the Revolution, and the political philosophy that underpinned it, it is clear that for Vygotsky it allowed a radical change in the direction that his life would take.

psychological experiments of others, and also create his own experimental investigations. It was this work that led him to the next quantum leap in his career;

It was the presentation of some of his own findings and his authoritative critique of well-known psychologists during the Second Psychoneurology Congress in Leningrad in 1924 that earned him an invitation to come and work at the Institute of Experimental Psychology at Moscow University (Van der Veer and Valsiner 1991). In themselves, Vygotsky's early investigations were not truly remarkable, but shortly before they were carried out the Institute of Experimental Psychology had been purged, and its new leader, Konstantin Kornilov, urgently needed capable young persons to fill the many vacancies. (Van der Veer, 2007, p. 22)

This Congress was Vygotsky's first appearance in the academic world of psychology, and it is clear that his presentations caused something of a stir, resulting in the fact that he was immediately offered a new job in Moscow. His daughter recalls that "From this moment on, research was the primary content of his life. He turned 27. Ahead was 10 more years of life and work. Only 10 years..." (Vygodskaya, 1995, p. 7).

It was at the Institute of Experimental Psychology that he was placed at the forefront of a group of researchers who were setting out to develop a new psychology that would embrace the Marxist view of the world. However, as Van der Veer points out

...nobody had any idea what a Marxist psychology should entail. The only thing that was clear in the early 1920s was that 'the authorities' (e.g. one's superior at the university, a friendly colleague active in the Party) demanded a Marxist psychology and that ignoring that demand was not going to advance and might even positively harm one's academic career. (2007, p. 22)

It should also be noted that Vygotsky, despite the fact that his work is not always seen to be overtly Marxist, was in fact deeply steeped in “Marxian<sup>83</sup> concepts” (Moll, 2014, p. 24). In Moscow, he also befriended and began to collaborate with A.R. Luria and A.N. Leontiev; calling themselves the “troika” (Vygotskaya, 1995, p. 7), and together they set about “a total restructuring of psychological research and theory” (Cole, 2006, p. 196). As Luis Moll observes, this was a monumental project, but one undertaken by three brilliant men who were “young, bold, and energetic. When they met, Leontiev was 21, Luria was 22, and the more experienced Vygotsky was 27. None yet had their doctorates. ... One could argue that their agenda required the energy and ambition of youth” (2014, p. 25). Interestingly in terms of my own study, this portrait of the ‘troika’ corresponds closely to the ideas explored in the previous Section; like many creative collaborators, they were young, iconoclastic, working outside of the mainstream of psychological thought, and collaborative in their approach. This collaborative approach was increasingly important in Vygotsky’s work;

In his final years, he never worked alone. He collaborated not only with talented colleagues but with outstanding students, who later worked together to sustain his legacy ... (Moll, 2014, p. 29).

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<sup>83</sup> It should be noted that a number of scholars characterise Vygotsky’s work as ‘Marxian’, rather than ‘Marxist’. The difference between these two terms is best summed up by the following definitions:

Marxism : the political, economic, and social principles and policies advocated by Marx; *especially* :a theory and practice of socialism, including the labor theory of value, dialectical materialism, the class struggle, and dictatorship of the proletariat until the establishment of a classless society ("Marxism." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 20 Nov. 2017.)

Marxian: of, developed by, or influenced by the doctrines of Marx ("Marxian." *Merriam-Webster.com*. Merriam-Webster, n.d. Web. 20 Nov. 2017.)

It is clear that in the last 10 years of his life, Vygotsky's work took on a frenetic pace. As Van der Veer observes, the sheer volume of work he undertook was extraordinary:

In the ten years that separated Vygotsky from his death, he would always simultaneously work for publishing houses, edit scientific journals, teach courses at various universities and institutes, act as a clinical psychologist at various clinics, supervise dissertations, work for governmental committees, organize and attend conferences, devise research plans, and write numerous popular and scientific articles and books. The number of activities and the quality of his work is truly remarkable if we realize that all this was accomplished by a person suffering from tuberculosis who at times suffered attacks that incapacitated him for months in a row. (2007, p. 23)

The effects of Vygotsky's tuberculosis must have made it clear to him that he did not have much time; as early as 1925, he had been so ill that doctors had given him only months to live (Vygodskaya, 1995). At the time, there was no treatment or cure for tuberculosis, and having nursed his younger brother through to his death from the disease, Vygotsky must have been acutely aware of his fate. Van der Veer points to the importance of Vygotsky's illness as a motivating factor in his work:

His feverish activity, his devotion to his work, his contempt for sloppy work and less than full dedication, can only be understood against the following background: here was a man who knew his time was running out fast... (2007, p. 26)

Thus, in those last 10 years of his life, Vygotsky produced a huge body of work, despite periodic crises that incapacitated and hospitalized him for months on end. Finally, he suffered a severe attack of tuberculosis which resulted in his premature death on 11 June 1934.

Interestingly, Van der Veer (2007) alerts us to the fact that the period immediately before Vygotsky's death had been increasingly difficult for him, as his ideas had fallen out of favour with the Stalinist regime. As a result, the threads of much of Vygotsky's work were,

within a few years of his death, deemed 'unscientific' in terms of the politics of the USSR at the time. As Van der Veer observes,

The posthumous criticisms, in particular, strongly suggest that he would not have been able to continue his work after 1936. Moreover, had he lived on, he might have been arrested and perished in the Gulag Archipelago. It is probable that his death from tuberculosis in a way saved him from a more horrible death. (2007, p. 29)

This posthumous critique and virtual 'banning' of Vygotsky's work is one of the key reasons why it took almost 30 years before a large portion of his work was published, and for it to become available in the Western world. However, Vygotsky's work did survive this long period of suppression largely because of the effort of Luria, Leotiev, and a number of Vygotsky's students and colleagues, who despite great personal risk, continued to expand upon and explore his ideas for many years after his death. Luria, for example, is quoted as saying, "Vygotsky was a genius. ... All of my work has been no more than the working out of the psychological theory which he constructed" (in Vygotsky, 1978, endpapers). This sense of devotion to Vygotsky's ideas is evident in many of those who went on to explore the vast number of ideas that he had only begun to elucidate in his work.

### *An Overview of Vygotskian Theory*

To attempt to offer a comprehensive summary of all the various aspects of Vygotskian thought, is far beyond the scope of a thesis such as this. The broad range of his scholarship includes writing on child development, play, creativity, mediation, language, thought, education, clinical psychology, psychological practice, as well as many other aspects of psychology. In addition, he is seen to be one of the fathers of the socio-cultural tradition, and of Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). The breadth of this corpus of work has meant that there are scholars whose entire career is devoted to the study and development of any one of these aspects, and few attempt to engage with all aspects of his work.

The other problem that any researcher faces when trying to grapple with Vygotsky's work, is that his is a contested set of ideas. There is much debate about the 'real' meaning of Vygotsky's work, with accusation and counter-accusation of misinterpretation between scholars who work in the field (Daniels, 1996; Chaiklin, 2003; Ageyev, 2003). One reason for this is that, in many ways, Vygotsky's ideas were not fully formed, and were "composed some sixty years ago by a writer who was both ill and working on the edges of disciplines with which he was only partially familiar" (Daniels, 1996, p. 3). At the time of his death at the age of 37, he was really only at the beginning of what could have been a lengthy and varied career. As leading Vygotskian scholar Harry Daniels points out

There is a sense in which one can feel Vygotsky "talking his way in" to a thesis that was never finished. This image of an obviously hugely talented thinker grappling with disciplines such as psychology, in which he was, like Piaget, to a large part untrained, carries with it a sense of excitement and verve. (1996, p. 2)

Instead of having time to fully explore his ideas, and to test them through experimentation and rigorous scrutiny, he only had time to express many of them in their nascent form. In post-Revolution Russia of the 1930s, and in the context of his illness, however, there was not the time, or in some cases the resources, to test all of his ideas and to fully grapple with their implications.

Another aspect of the difficulty with the interpretation of Vygotsky's work is for pragmatic reasons; there are numerous problems associated with the translation of Vygotsky's work into English. The first publication of Vygotsky's work in the West was *Thought and Language*, in 1962. Edited and translated by Eugenia Hanfmann and Gertrude Vakar (Vygotsky, 1962), it is now widely criticised, partly because it presents a truncated version of the original Russian text, and also because "almost all references to Marx were

expunged from the first English language translation” (Daniels, 1996, p. 2)<sup>84</sup>. This was followed by the publication of *Mind In Society* (Vygotsky, 1978). Edited by Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, and Ellen Souberman, this slim volume of excerpts from Vygotsky’s work is still considered to be one of the most significant sources for Vygotskian scholars. However, the editors took “significant liberties” (in Vygotsky, 1978, p. x), in their own words, with Vygotsky’s text;

The reader will encounter here not a literal translation of Vygotsky but rather our edited translation of Vygotsky, from which we have omitted material that seemed redundant and to which we have added material that seemed to make his points clearer. (in Vygotsky, 1978, p. x)

Partly, this may have been because Vygotsky’s style of writing is notoriously difficult to decipher and translate. As the editors point out, he wrote a vast number of papers, most of which were not edited and published until many years after his death; because he was not there to correct any of these papers at the time of their publication, it is natural that there may be a number of errors that have crept in. In addition, it is also known that he often dictated his work, as he was too weak to write, which also serves to confuse the contemporary reader. He also seldom referenced his ideas – he would allude to various sources, but because these were not systematically referenced in any way, it has proved hard for his translators and editors to track down the ideas that he was working from (in Vygotsky, 1978, p. x). Nevertheless, much of the Vygotskian scholarship in America, primarily, is based on the understanding created by these particular texts.

As a result, there are marked differences in the way in which Vygotsky’s work is understood today in Russia, and in the West (Ageyev, 2003; Daniels, 1996). Harry Daniels notes that:

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<sup>84</sup> Thankfully, a later version in English, edited and translated by Alex Kozulin, offered a far more comprehensive version of Vygotsky’s original Russian text (Vygotsky, 1986 / 1934).

... the version of neo-Vygotskian psychology that is being developed in the West is regarded as, at best, partial, if not inaccurate, by those concerned with developmental psychology in present day Russia. ... The Vygotsky of the 1970s in the West was certainly not the Vygotsky of the 1920s and 1930s in the Soviet Union. (1996, pp. 2-3)

Thus, despite efforts to bridge the divide between Western Vygotskian scholars (who are largely dependent on English translations of Vygotsky's work), and those in Russia, there are considerable differences in these two sets of approaches to his ideas. As Daniels reminds us "The 'Vygotskies' who are being created in the 1990s in the West as well as in the post-Soviet Russia are diverse and must be seen in their own cultural context" (1996, p. 3). Certainly in my own case, I am working very much from the Western tradition of Vygotskian thought, which resonates clearly with the context in which I learn and teach.

In spite of these difficulties and contestations, however, Vygotsky's work has become increasingly popular since the publication of *Mind in Society* (1978), and he continues to offer both psychologists and educational theorists a range of ideas with which to grapple. In many ways, his ideas were so far ahead of their time, that they continue to open up new avenues of thought and investigation for scholars grappling with the challenges of education and thought in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As Alex Kozulin inquires,

What is the secret of Vygotsky's popularity? Why does a theory developed in Moscow a few years after the Russian Revolution capture the imagination of American educators at the beginning of the 21st century?

One possible explanation of this puzzling phenomenon is that Vygotsky's theory offers us answers to the questions that were not asked earlier. It is only now that we have started posing questions that make Vygotsky's "answers" relevant. (2003, p. 15)

Some of the 'questions' that Kozulin identifies include multiculturalism, mediation, and learning potential, all of which relate in some way to Vygotsky's ideas.



This brings us, of course, to a consideration of what Vygotsky's ideas actually entail. James Wertsch offers a broad delineation of what he considers to be the key themes that tie together all of Vygotsky's ideas:

The three themes that form the core of Vygotsky's theoretical framework are (1) a reliance on a genetic or developmental method; (2) the claim that higher mental processes in the individual have their origin in social processes; and (3) the claim that mental processes can be understood only if we understand the tools and signs that mediate them. (1985, p. 14)

At first sight, this is daunting, especially for someone like myself with virtually no background in psychology. Wertsch also alerts us to the fact that these three aspects are interrelated within Vygotsky's work (1985, p. 15). Luis C Moll, in attempting to grapple with Vygotskian thought, helpfully paraphrases some of Wertsch's ideas, and sums up Vygotsky's key themes as follows:

Higher mental processes, such as problem solving and voluntary attention, have a social origin.

Human thinking must be understood developmentally (historically), at both the individual and cultural levels of analysis.

Mediational means of various kinds are crucial in human social and psychological development. (2014, pp. 29-30)

So what does this all mean? Essentially, Vygotskian thought is based on the premise that "human activities take place in cultural contexts, are mediated by language and other symbol systems, and can be best understood when investigated in their historical development" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 2). Thus, his work examines what John-Steiner and Mahn call "the dynamic interdependence of social and individual processes", and conceives of development as "the transformation of socially shared activities into internalized processes" (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 3). Vygotsky therefore views the development of the human being as a process whereby new ideas, experiences, and behaviours are first learned in the context of social interaction with others, and gradually

internalised through the process of mediation and individuation.

Thus, Vygotsky's ideas are constructivist in nature. In Vygotsky's view, the primary means for learning and the construction of meaning is through social interaction;

Any function of the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as a intrapsychological category.... Social relations or relations amongst people genetically underlie all higher functions and their relationships. (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 163)

Theorists have termed this process of moving from the 'interpsychological' to the 'intrapsychological' "the general genetic law of development" (Daniels, 1996, p. 7), or "Vygotsky's genetic method" (Wertsch, 1985, p. 17). Wertsch understands the genetic method as a view of development through which "human mental processes can be understood only by considering how and where they occur in growth" (1985, p. 17). Vygotsky was opposed to the 'stage theories' of development offered by other psychologists such as Piaget, which connected the development of the psychology of the child to their chronological age, and rather focussed on how the child (and also the adult) develops through the process of social interaction and mediation.

The notion of mediation is an important part of Vygotsky's thinking, particularly in the way that development is influenced by the child's interaction with what he terms "tools and symbols" (1978, p. 19). Silvia Scribner comments that

Vygotsky's special genius was in grasping the significance of the social in things as well as people. The world in which we live is humanized, full of material and symbolic objects (signs, knowledge systems) that are culturally constructed, historical in origin and social in content. Since all human actions, including acts of thought, involve the mediation of such objects ('tools and signs') they are, on this

score alone, social in essence. (1990, p. 92)

Primarily, the 'tools and symbols' that Vygotsky was most concerned with were sign systems such as spoken and written language, which he considered to be socially constructed. As the editors of *Mind in Society* (Vygotsky, 1978) observe,

Vygotsky believed that the internalization of culturally produced sign systems brings about behavioural transformations and forms the bridge between early and later forms of individual development. Thus for Vygotsky, in the tradition of Marx and Engels, the mechanism of individual developmental change is rooted in society and culture. (in Vygotsky, 1978, p. 7)

In Vygotsky's view, the individual learns and constructs the meanings of the things, signs, and words around them through social interaction, which is culturally determined. We can extend the metaphor somewhat here, and I would suggest that theatrical work also includes the use of a complex sign system that is particular to the theatre, which is culturally produced, and which includes the verbal, written, spatial, physical, and technical 'languages' of the theatre.

This brings us to Vygotsky's ideas about learning itself, which are contained in his most famous (and also most misunderstood) concept; the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). It is this aspect of Vygotsky's work that is most useful to me in understanding **why** teaching and learning happen within my collaborative theatre-making practice, and so I will spend some time discussing its meaning, and how neo-Vygotskian scholars have expanded on the concept to broaden the range of the types of learning it encompasses, as well as looking at the ways in which we could conceive of the *FrontLines* Project as a ZPD.

## *The Zone of Proximal Development*

As Peter Smagorinsky observes, it is ironic that out of his large body of work, Vygotsky is most well-known for a concept that he only wrote about in three places (Smagorinsky, 2011 & 2013). Vygotsky's most oft-quoted description of the Zone of Proximal Development is deceptively simple, and I will reproduce it extensively here, as a starting point for my discussion. He begins with what has been called 'the classic example',

Suppose I investigate two children upon entrance into school, both of whom are ten years old chronologically and eight years old in terms of mental development. Can I say that they are the same age mentally? Of course. What does this mean? It means that they can independently deal with tasks up to the degree of difficulty that has been standardized for the eight-year-old level. If I stop at this point, people would imagine that the subsequent course of mental development and of school learning for these children will be the same, because it depends on their intellect.... Now imagine that I do not terminate my study at this point, but only begin it. These children seem to be capable of handling problems up to an eight-year-old's level, but not beyond that. Suppose that I show them various ways of dealing with the problem.... In short, in some way or another I propose that the children solve the problem with my assistance. Under these circumstances, it turns out that the first child can deal with problems up to a twelve-year-old's level, the second up to a nine-year-old's. Now are these children mentally the same? (Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 85-86)

In seeking to formulate an answer to this question, Vygotsky then goes on to define the Zone of Proximal Development:

This difference between twelve and eight, or between eight and nine, is what we call *the zone of proximal development*. *It is the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers.*[his emphasis] ....

The zone of proximal development defines those functions that have not yet matured but are in the process of maturation, functions that will mature tomorrow but are currently in an embryonic state. ... The actual developmental level characterizes mental development retrospectively, while the zone of proximal development characterizes mental development prospectively. ... what is in the zone of proximal development today will be the actual developmental level tomorrow – that is, what a child can do with assistance today she will be able to do by herself tomorrow. (1978, pp. 86-87)

Therefore, the Zone of Proximal Development is the space of possibility that lies between the level at which the child is comfortable and capable of performing tasks by themselves at present, and the level at which they *will become* comfortable and capable of performing tasks in the future, but which they cannot yet perform on their own. In this space, the adult or their peers can act as agents of change that help them to ‘bridge the gap’, so to speak. As Irina Verenikina observes “Vygotsky viewed children and adults as both being active agents in the process of child’s development” (2008, p. 164). Vygotsky notes that “children are capable of doing much more in collective activity or under the guidance of adults” (1978, p. 88). Peter Smagorinsky expands on this idea, characterising the ZPD as “an individual’s zone of potential that can be scaffolded into something new by a skilled adult or more competent peer, resulting in tomorrow’s new, individual competencies” (2013, p. 199).

When I first encountered the notion of the ZPD, in reading John-Steiner’s work on creative collaboration (2000), I felt a startling sense of recognition; here was a theory that could explain what I felt instinctively was happening in my collaborative theatre-making practice. This notion, of a space of discomfort between what is known *now*, and what will be known in the *future* resonated strongly with my own ontological and epistemological positions; it is only by taking ourselves beyond our ‘comfort zone’ of learning and development, that we are able to grow into new knowledge and new ways of being. John-Steiner’s work was a gateway to further understanding of the notion of the ZPD, and the more I have learnt about it, the more connected I have felt to this concept. While I am not teaching children, I am dealing with young adults in the early days of their professional and

artistic development, and it is in the ZPD that I found the key to unlock the meaning of the teaching and learning I was experiencing in my practice.

In many ways, of course, Vygotsky's conception of the ZPD was his attempt to address the notion of assessment that existed in the Soviet Union at the time, and both Peter Smagorinsky (2011) and Seth Chaiklin (2003) stress the importance of this in developing an understanding of what Vygotsky intended the ZPD to be,

[Vygotsky's] idea of the ZPD challenged conventional assessment practices that viewed (and continue to view) children as individual actors whose school performances indicate their independent abilities and achievements. Vygotsky's contention that assisted performance typically produces higher levels of achievement challenged assessment practices that viewed abilities as fixed and therefore as measurable in a definitive way, as remains the case with standardized tests of reading and other abilities. (Smagorinsky, 2011, p. 52)

Thus, Vygotsky's idea of the ZPD was directly aimed at challenging the idea that the assessment of what children were capable of *now* [what Vygotsky calls the "retrospective" level of mental development (1978, p. 86)] was an accurate determination of their mental abilities. Rather, Vygotsky advocates for the way in which the use of the ZPD can help to determine the child's potential to develop [what he calls their "prospective" level of mental development (1978, p. 87)];

The zone of proximal development furnishes psychologists and educators with a tool through which the internal course of development can be understood.... Thus, the zone of proximal development permits us to delineate the child's immediate future and his dynamic developmental state, allowing not only for what already has been achieved developmentally but also for what is in the course of maturing. ... The state of a child's mental development can be determined only by clarifying its two levels: the actual developmental level and the zone of proximal development. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 87)

A consideration of Vygotsky's work in general shows the roots of his thinking here; he had

worked for many years already in the grimly-named field of ‘defectology’, which today would most probably be called ‘special needs education’. In working with children with developmental problems, Vygotsky was, I believe, seeking to find a more accurate way to ascertain their mental potential than the methods that were available to him at the time. As he points out

The zone of proximal development can become a powerful concept in developmental research, one that can markedly enhance the effectiveness and utility of the application of diagnostics of mental development to educational problems. (1978, p. 87)

We can therefore see that for Vygotsky, the ZPD could function as a diagnostic tool that would allow him greater insight into the development of the minds of the children he worked with.

This is an important point to consider; for Vygotsky, the ZPD was a theory of *development*, not one of *education*. Like so much of Vygotsky’s work in general, the ZPD suffers from the problems of interpretation, and seems to be particularly difficult to pin down. As Smagorinsky observes, “it has become all things to all people, thus both making it a pervasive reference in social science research and rendering it so amorphous that it requires explication for particular applications (2011, pp. 49 - 50). In education, the ZPD has been widely adopted as a theory of teaching and learning, and has become closely associated with the notion of ‘scaffolding’, first postulated by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976)<sup>85</sup>. As Seth Chaiklin wonders, however, “If Vygotsky’s intention was to use the concept

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<sup>85</sup> There is much debate about the notion of scaffolding as far as it pertains to the ZPD, with many Vygotskian scholars (including Chaiklin (2003), Verenikina (2008), Daniels (2008), and Smagorinsky (2011), among others) questioning the way in which the notion of scaffolding has come to be conflated with the idea of the ZPD. As this argument has little influence on my own understanding of the ZPD, I have chosen not to discuss this at length here.

for all kinds of learning, then why not name it the *zone of proximal learning*? Why does the term *development* appear in the concept?” (2003, p. 42). Partly, I think that Vygotsky himself answers this question; if we read further than his basic definition of the ZPD, we come to understand that for Vygotsky, learning forms an integral part of development:

*... human learning presupposes a specific social nature and a process by which children grow into the intellectual life of those around them. [his emphasis] (1978, p. 88)*

Vygotsky expands on this position, demonstrating that for him,

...learning is not development; however, properly organized learning results in mental development and sets in motion a variety of developmental processes that would be impossible apart from learning. Thus, learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human, psychological functions. (1978, p. 90)

We can therefore understand that Vygotsky positions learning as one of the key processes that facilitate development. He sees learning as the process that “creates the zone of proximal development” (1978, p. 90). However, he also cautions against the idea that learning and development happen simultaneously, and points out that “the developmental process lags behind the learning process” (1978, p. 90) ; thus, it can be seen that the learning process lays out the steps that allow the child’s development to follow.

Lois Holzman calls Vygotsky’s work “*a theory of becoming* [her emphasis]” (2009, p. 17), and to me this points to an essential aspect of the ZPD; it is not a space of “what is”, but rather a space of “what is becoming” (Holzman, 2009, p. 17). As Holzman goes on to explain

Vygotsky broke through the linear and causal understandings of learning (and/or instruction) and development and how they are related. His writings extensively present and argue against the prevailing views that learning depends on and follows development or that learning and development are related in some



unspecified manner. ... He conceptualized learning and development not as discrete particulars that interact, but as a dialectical unity in which learning leads development (Vygotsky, 1987). (2009, p. 18)

To me, this is borne out by my own experience in interviewing my student participants, and by anecdotal evidence provided by my continued contact with some of the students who were involved in the *FrontLines* Project. While an enormous amount of learning happened during the process of the project, the real sense of understanding of that learning seems to have developed in the intervening space between the project itself and the time of our interviews. This time-lapse allowed the student participants the time to fully internalize the lessons they had learnt in the project, and to be able to express that learning to me as coherently as they did.

Of course, if we understand the relationship between learning and development in this way, then we naturally have to consider the role of teaching in the ZPD. Vera John-Steiner, M. Cathrene Connery and Ana Marjanovic-Shane observe, “To understand the full meaning of the ZPD is to recognize that it is not a recipe for teaching skills” (2010, p. 9). Rather, in Vygotsky’s conception of the dialectical relationship between learning and development,

...teaching represents the means through which development is advanced; that is, the socially elaborated contents of human knowledge and the cognitive strategies necessary for their internalization are evoked in the learners... (John-Steiner & Soubberman, 1978, p. 131)

This sense of ‘evoking’ knowledge and development demands that we understand teaching not simply as the transmission of knowledge through a ‘chalk and talk’ process of knowledge transference from the teacher to the pupil but rather that

It describes teaching as strongly influenced by, and embedded in its social and cultural context and points to the meaning of teaching as *the transformation of socially constructed knowledge into that which is individually owned by the learner*. This type of teaching assumes a specific paradigm, of teacher-student interaction where the role of the adult is that of *collaborator and co-constructor*.

[my emphasis] (Verenikina, 2008, p. 161)

This notion implies that the teacher ceases to be what Dorothy Heathcote calls ‘the one who knows’ (Wagner, 1999) (see Section 2), and rather becomes a collaborator, who can facilitate the co-construction of knowledge within the ZPD.

Gordon Wells describes this shift in the way that the teacher views him/her self;

rather than being primarily a dispenser of knowledge and assigner of grades, the teacher sees him or herself as a fellow learner whose prime responsibility is to act as leader of a community committed to the co-construction of knowledge (Wells, 1999, p. 331)

To me, this lies at the heart of what is important about Vygotsky’s work; it constitutes a space in which meaning and knowledge are co-constructed between teacher and student in ways that place both parties in the position of both ‘knower’ and ‘learner’;

The main aspiration of teaching in the ZPD is to see students being actively engaged in their learning with the future prospect of becoming self-directed, life long learners. The definition of the ZPD implies *the meaning of teaching as co-construction of knowledge between the teacher and the learner and further transformation of that knowledge into individual knowledge of the learner. The teacher-learner interaction becomes that of collaboration and co-learning.* (my emphasis) (Verenikina, 2008, pp. 165 - 166)

As we have already seen, this corresponds to my own position as a collaborator, and as a director in my collaborative theatre-making process. I have already spoken about the way in which I see my role as that of an ‘evoker’ and facilitator of learning, as I work with my students and my collaborators to co-create and co-construct the meaning of the theatrical work. I consciously remove myself from the position of being ‘the one who knows’, and instead see my role as being “*to ask the right questions*”, as I put it in my RSI, which allow the students to discover their own way into the work that we do.

For Tamar and I, the ontological basis of our thought as teachers can be expressed through the following observation, which Tamar made to me when I interviewed her:

*I think methodologically that's something else that is there, is that teaching ethic in a way, of going that, there's a responsibility not just to make the work ... especially with **FrontLines**, for me anyway, I felt such a strong responsibility in that piece that it was not actually only about what they learned from doing the project per se, but I felt such a strong responsibility that they learned ethically, that they had a sense of an engagement. Because I was so shocked when we started with them, about how little they knew and for me it was such an important thing that they came away from it with a broader, a deeper understanding of what, I say what it means to be human. And so for me that became a huge part of it and I think that both of us felt that responsibility.*

Certainly for me, my sense of myself as a teacher and as a director is deeply influenced by the notion of being a collaborator and a co-constructor of learning. As I explained to Tamar in my RSI,

*The idea of openness and of everybody bringing what they know and who they are to the process is very important to me. The idea that people don't come as empty vessels, they don't just come as little model figures that you can move around. They come with ideas, they come with perceptions, they come with knowledge, they come with all sorts of things and it is your job as a director to access that stuff and make it work for the production.*

My students are not empty vessels, waiting to be filled; rather, they bring their own “funds of knowledge”<sup>86</sup> (Moll, 2014) to the process when we work together, and I learn as much

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<sup>86</sup> This is especially true because I work in a multi-cultural, multi-racial and multi-lingual context. It would be arrogant in the extreme of me to assume that mine is the only knowledge that matters here; I learn an enormous amount about different languages, cultures, forms of performance, and ways of seeing the world, through my interaction with students.

from them as they do from me.

Another important aspect of Vygotsky's thinking around the ZPD is the notion of play. For Vygotsky, play forms the basis of much of the child's learning outside of the formal classroom setting. For Vygotsky, play is one of the most important ways in which children learn through social interaction.

... play creates a zone of proximal development in the child. In play, a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all the developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development. ... Action in the imaginary sphere, in an imaginary situation, the creation of voluntary intentions, and the formation of real-life plans and volitional motives – all appear in play and make it the highest level of playschool development. (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102)

Despite the fact that Vygotsky was largely talking here about early childhood play, Lois Holzman's work points to the fact that play, or what she calls "*learning playfully* [her emphasis]" (2010, p. 37) forms an important part of development "across the life span" (2010, p. 35). Vygotsky's view of play can therefore be understood as,

...an interactive social form of embodied imagination. Play simultaneously requires and leads to complex symbolic constructions, behavioral mastery, collaborative protocols, emotional arousal and control, and the production of group cultural lore.... For Vygotsky, play represents the first appearance of imagination in development – as imagination in action. (John-Steiner, Connery, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010, p. 11)

This allows us to see the ZPD as a space of 'playful learning' and creative collaboration, where development happens through playful and creative means. As Carrie Lobman observes

If learning itself is seen as a creative activity, meaning human beings actively

create it, then what is needed to reinitiate learning and development is not remediation, but to engage students and teachers in the playful activity of creating environments for learning and development to occur. (2010, p. 204)

This notion of playful and creative collaboration for learning and development is key to my own understanding of the ZPD, and its application to my own work.

We have already seen that a sense of ‘fun’ and ‘freedom’ were identified by students as being important in their learning. Nhlakanipho in particular spoke about this quality of *learning playfully* (Lobman, 2010):

*NHLAKANIPHO: You guys allowed us to play a lot, you and Tamar allowed us to play a lot with the text and the things we are able to do.*

*TANYA: Was that playing in **FrontLines** important?*

*NHLKANIPHO: Yes, because you were able to give or deliver these lines as yourself. You were able to find how you fit into the situation instead of just sounding like an actor reciting lines on stage, you would sound like a performer, or the actual character. So playing allows you to find a way to fit in, that’s what I believe.*

Of course, the quality of playfulness is characteristic of the theatre; in creating the fictional world of the drama, we are in a constant state of imaginative play. However, it is clear that in the *FrontLines* Project, through ‘playful’ and ‘fun’ processes, students were able to find their own way to handle the material, and so build their own meaning and knowledge from the project.

### *Expanded understandings of the Zone of Proximal Development*

As I have already discussed, despite the fact that it is the most well-known aspect of Vygotsky’s thought, he actually wrote relatively little about the concept. However, due to its

amorphous nature, and the way in which it has been widely accepted, the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development has also undergone much expansion and adaptation by contemporary 'neo-Vygotskian' scholars. As John-Steiner, Connery and Marjanovic-Shane point out

Currently, researchers have broadened the concept to include peer-based reciprocal assistance including 'all aspect(s) of the learner – acting, thinking and feeling' (Wells 1999, p.331) and mutual zones of proximal development for collaborative partners (John-Steiner, 2000). In this broader view of the ZPD, scholars have come to identify that the co-construction of new ideas includes the sharing of risks, constructive criticism, and the creation of a safety zone. (2010, p. 9)

As we have already seen in Section 2, the shared thinking and co-construction of ideas, the sharing of risks, the use of constructive criticism as a generative force, and the mutual support implied by a 'safety zone' are all characteristics of my own collaborative theatre-making practice. However, while the quotation above points to some of the expanded ideas that have arisen around the ZPD, it does not cover all of the varied ways in which scholars are extending and enlarging Vygotsky's ideas. I will present just a few of these which I think will be helpful in terms of my own work.

Firstly, it is prudent to remember that in Vygotsky's writings, he only referred to the ZPD as part of the developmental process of the *child*. However, many of the contemporary expansions of the ZPD also consider the ways in which it is part of the developmental process of the adult learner, which of course makes its application to my own practice more appropriate. Vera John-Steiner notes that "Developing children, as well as developing adults, expand their affective resources by appropriating the consequences of shared experiences" (2000, p. 128) . This points to the important expansion of the ZPD to include the affective or emotional sphere. This idea is widely explored in the work of John-Steiner (2000) and John-Steiner and Mahn (1996), and also forms the basis for much of Lois Holzman's discussion of her work using Vygotsky in a therapeutic environment (2009). This train of thought is based on Vygotsky's work around what he called *perezhivanie*, which can

be translated as “lived emotional experience” (John-Steiner, Connery, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010, p. 8)<sup>87</sup>. As Mahn and John-Steiner observe

An expanded understanding of the zpd that includes affective factors reveals it as a complex whole, a system of systems in which the interrelated and interdependent elements include the participants, artifacts, the environment or context, and the participants’ experience of the interactions within the zone. (Mahn & John-Steiner, *Developing the affective ZPD*, 2000, p. 1)

This expansion of our understanding of the ZPD allows us to conceptualise the ZPD as encompassing not only cognitive, but also affective development. John-Steiner and Mahn have called the affective support and encouragement implied in this view of the ZPD, “the gift of confidence” (2002), and have pointed to the importance of this emotional aspect in learning and development.

In addition, several theorists (Holzman, 2010; Lobman, 2010; John-Steiner, 2000) have pointed to the importance of the concept of the ZPD in creative endeavours. John-Steiner’s ground-breaking *Creative Collaboration* puts forward the notion that creative partners “create zones of proximal development for each other” (2000, p. 189). In this way, John-Steiner conceives of acts of creative collaboration as powerful zones of proximal development;

In the course of intense partnerships, new skills are acquired. The partners may develop previously unknown aspects of themselves through motivated joint participation. The collaboration context provides a mutual zone of proximal development where participants can increase their repertory of cognitive and emotional expression. (2000, p. 187)

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<sup>87</sup> There is a fairly large body of work that deals with analysis of Vygotsky’s work on *perezhivanie*, but I have chosen not to focus on this here, as I don’t feel that it adds a great deal to my argument at this point.

Needless to say, this notion of the way in which collaborative creative work can constitute a ZPD is extremely important in helping me to understand my own collaborative theatre-making practice. In Section 2 of this thesis, I offered a detailed discussion of the ways in which my collaborators (Tamar and Marié-Heleen) and I share a collaborative relationship in which we depend on each other, support each other, fulfil a 'cheerleading' role for each other, and learn from each other through mutual appropriation. The 'betweenness' of our collaborative relationship, therefore constitutes a ZPD in which each of us learns and develops *because of and through* our interactions with each other. In seeking a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the nature of our collaborative theatre-making practice, I have been able to conceive of that practice as a ZPD which is a continuous state of 'becoming' (to use Lobman's (2010) term).

In summing up the notion of the Zone of Proximal Development, Gordon Wells offers what I consider to be the most useful perspective on the many re-interpretations of Vygotsky's work, which I have chosen to quote here extensively;

Vygotsky tended to characterize the zpd in terms of individual assessment and instruction.... However, subsequent discussion... has considerably extended this characterization by emphasizing the holistic nature of the learning that takes place in the zpd and by making clear that it involves not simply speech but a wide range of mediational means, and not simply dyads in face-to-face interaction but all participants in collaborative communities of practice... rather than being a "fixed" attribute of the learner, the zpd constitutes a potential for learning that is created in the interaction between participants... In this sense, the zpd emerges in the activity and, as participants jointly resolve problems and construct solutions, the potential for further learning is expanded as new possibilities open up....[T]he zpd applies potentially to all participants, and not simply to the less skillful or knowledgeable... it is not only children who can learn in the zpd; learning continues over the life-span, and can at all ages and stages be assisted by others... Learning in the zpd involves all aspects of the learner – acting, thinking, and feeling; it not only changes the possibilities for participation but



also transforms the learner's identity. And, because individuals and the social world are mutually constitutive of each other, transformation of the learner also involves transformation of the communities of which he or she is a member and of the joint activities in which they engage. (1999, pp. 330 - 331)

This expanded and nuanced view of the ZPD therefore allows us the scope to understand the myriad ways that teaching, learning and development can be engendered in the Zone of Proximal Development.

### *The FrontLines Project as a Zone of Proximal Development*

If we take this understanding of the ZPD, and lay this like a gauze or scrim<sup>88</sup> over our earlier discussion of the teaching and learning in the *FrontLines* Project, we are able to discern the ways in which we can view the *FrontLines* Project as a whole as a ZPD, as well as being able to identify a number of 'smaller' ZPDs within the larger frame of the project as a whole. If we look back to John-Steiner and Mahn's notion of the ZPD as "a complex whole, a system of systems in which the interrelated and interdependent elements include the participants, artifacts, the environment or context, and the participants' experience of the interactions within the zone" (Mahn & John-Steiner, 2000, p. 1), we can understand the *FrontLines* Project as a whole as a similar 'system of systems'. The project as a whole is one large ZPD, but it also contains numerous smaller ZPD's including those between myself and my collaborators (see above), between the students and the teachers/directors, between the students of different Universities, between older student and younger students,

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<sup>88</sup> In theatre parlance, a gauze or a scrim cloth is a finely woven fabric that can be drawn across the stage. If you throw light onto it from the front, it becomes opaque, and one cannot see through it. If, however, you light it from behind, then the cloth becomes transparent, allowing the audience to see what lies behind it. As such, it is one of my favourite theatrical effects, creating a real sense of magical transformation.

between more experienced students and those new to production work, and so on. Wells (above) points out that the ZPD is not only constituted between “dyads in face-to-face interaction but all participants in collaborative communities of practice” (Wells, 1999, p. 330), and therefore we can conceive of the *FrontLines* Project as a complex interaction of multiple Zones of Proximal Development that intersect and overlap in a space that is full of “a potential for learning that is created in the interaction between participants” (Wells, 1999, p. 330).

As we have already seen, the *FrontLines* Project entailed multiple types and levels of teaching and learning, which points to “the holistic nature of the learning that takes place in the zpd” (Wells, 1999, p. 330). In making use of the ten types of teaching and learning I detailed in the last chapter, the project was able to address all the participants as complex wholes, who were able to learn and develop both cognitively and emotionally through their involvement in the project. In delineating these ten types of teaching and learning, it occurred to me that all of them involve some sense of discomfort, and of moving outside of our comfort zone. If we conceive of the ZPD as a zone of discomfort, a space in which we are stretched beyond the boundaries of what we already know and can do, then we can see the way in which this relates to the idea of the *FrontLines* Project as a ZPD.

This sense of discomfort is borne out in the data; again and again, my respondents talked about being ‘out of their comfort zone’. This was engendered firstly by the bringing together of the different groups of students who did not know each other. As Tamar observed, “*bringing those two groups of students together is very risky... there is a real risk that it doesn’t work*”. In so doing, we also took students out of their own comfortable spaces of learning; we took them to each other’s campuses, and made them inhabit different stage spaces. We also made them engage with teachers and directors they were not familiar with, as Tamar and I discussed with Brandon and Kamini:

*TANYA: If I told you to do something, sometimes you were more willing to do it for me than you were for Tamar, and the same with Marié-Heleen. Because*

*there's not the same degree of familiarity. So, it's almost like if somebody else is telling you, you're willing to be braver, than you are with somebody who you see every day.*

KAMINI: *Yeah ...*

BRANDON: *Absolutely.*

TAMAR: *They just don't like listening to me... They're bored.*

KAMINI: *Never!*

TANYA: *No it's not that. It's really about familiarity and about going 'oh, you know I don't do that', because I found the DUT students used to do that to me, and if you told them to do something, they would be braver.*

BRANDON: *You get into a bit of a comfort zone, and when somebody else comes into it, the comfort zone goes away now, and now you want to ...*

TAMAR: *Because also they aren't coming in with a sense of, okay, I know what that person does, so ...*

BRANDON: *You're also more likely to want to show them what you can do, whether it be something you have done before ...*

TANYA: *Proving yourself!*

BRANDON: *Absolutely!*

In working with both directors and peers who were not 'familiar', students were prompted, as Lauren put it "*to push*"; they worked to expand their skills and extend the range of what they could do, as the project served to remove them from their comfort zone. Lauren went on to explain that:

*We get very comfortable in the way that things are taught at UKZN for example; we know what's expected. You know, when you are taught by a specific teacher what they look for, in the way they mark, and so on and so forth and I think you get very comfortable in your little bubble of UKZN, and to have that bubble literally popped by a whole bunch of other students, who come in and have a different set of skills that you can sit there and go 'we can't do that', that was nice because, it kind of shakes you out of your comfort zone and I think that was one of the most fun things and also the most daunting things that we learnt from one another.*

Thus, this sense of discomfort *facilitates* the learning, allowing students to learn both from each other and from new teachers in ways that they might never have imagined possible.

## *Conclusions*

Herein lies the answer to my **why?** question. By taking ourselves and our students out of our comfort zone, we place ourselves and our students within a complex system of zones of proximal development. Within this 'Zone of Zones', complex and multilayered processes of teaching and learning can take place which allow collaborators and students to teach, learn, grow, and develop in a holistic and organic manner that engenders lasting change. Thus, the *FrontLines* Project can be seen as space of possibility in which knowledge is socially constructed, in which learning is mediated through the multiple languages (verbal, written, physical, spatial, and technical) of the theatre, and in which this knowledge can be internalised and applied through repetition.

In each type of teaching and learning I have listed in my discussion in Chapter 9, all of us involved in the project are moving out of the place of comfortable knowing, and into a place in which the project itself and our involvement in it stretches our talents, our skills, and our knowledge, to move us into a space of new knowing. Thus, we move beyond what we already know about history, through engaging with the content of the work; we learn new professional and technical skills, or hone the ones we already have; our sense of ourselves, and our way of relating to the world is challenged and extended through the experience of the project; we learn new skills by working with others, and trying new things; we learn independently by being given the space in which to try, and fail, and try again; we learn by watching others around us work, doing things that we may not yet know how to do; we learn through the process of making a piece of theatre, and our learning "emerges in the activity and as participants jointly resolve problems and construct solutions" (Wells, 1999, pp. 330-331); we learn by repetition, and by being given the opportunity to correct our mistakes and improve upon our performance; we learn both from good experiences and

from bad ones, both of which extend our skills and our emotional development; and so, as we reach new types of understanding and knowing, we are able to internalize and make this new knowledge our own, in a lasting and permanent way.

## Chapter 11 – In Conclusion

*I believe that the impulse to learn is a life-giving and sustaining drive. The theatre can satisfy this need to learn, this desire to flourish, in unique and remarkable ways. ...Ultimately, our job is not to teach others but to learn with them. (Bogart, 2007, p. 88)*

And so, having answered my three critical questions, I have reached the end of my exploration of my collaborative theatre-making practice. In this study, I have looked at the ways in which I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice through the devising of the *FrontLines* Project; I have uncovered the inner workings of my collaborative practice and conceived of a series of 'selves' in understanding who I am as a collaborator; I have identified ten different types of teaching and learning which take place in the *FrontLines* Project; and theorised that the reason why this happens is because the project forms a complex Zone of Proximal Development, in which we are all able to both teach and learn simultaneously.

### *Revisiting the 'Idiot's Guide to Self-study'*

In thinking about how I could sum up and conclude my study, I went back to the beginning, and thought about the way in which I had set out the parameters of what I was trying to do in my inquiry. In this study, I set out to excavate both my personal history, and the self-in-action that I bring to the practice of collaborative theatre-making. In so doing, I used a self-reflexive approach grounded in self-study methods, centred around the 'Idiot's Guide to Self-Study', which I presented in Chapter 2. In looking back at my study from the perspective of the end point, I decided that I would revisit these five key characteristics of

self-study, to see how my ideas about each characteristic may have changed or developed<sup>89</sup>, now that I have reached the end of my process of moving “forward from not knowing to knowing” (Pithouse-Morgan, Mitchell, & Pillay, 2014, p. 1).

### *1. Self-Study is Personal and Self-initiated*

While it has always been clear to me that this study is rooted in my own experience and practice, as my study has progressed I have become more and more aware of the ways in which my study is situated in my fairly unique lived experience. There is an old saying that reads, “May you live in interesting times”, and in these terms, I consider myself to have been blessed to have watched history in action, throughout my lifetime; I have always lived in interesting times.

As a South African who was born in the 1970s, who was a teenager during the worst days of the armed struggle and the State of Emergency, who entered University just as the ANC was unbanned, who celebrated the advent of democracy in my country just after graduating, and who has lived through the birth of a difficult new country out of the ashes of our terrible past, mine is not a completely unique story, but it is certainly unusual. My life has been lived in the midst of turmoil and change, and although I have lived a sheltered and privileged life despite all these cataclysmic and seismic shifts, I am increasingly aware that the particularity of my “lived emotional experience” (John-Steiner, Connery, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010, p. 8), or, to use Vygotsky’s term, *perezhivanie*, has a direct influence on how and why I work in the way that I do.

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<sup>89</sup> This is a significant part of the iterative nature of self-study; we always look back to look forward, in a hermeneutic process “whereby the researcher shifts forward and backward through the data” (Samaras & Freese, 2006, p.12).

Much of the artistic and pedagogical intent that underpins my work has to do with finding commonality, and understanding my self and others ‘in-relation’. I believe that this is because I am acutely aware that the fundamental success of the apartheid system lay in the pervasive belief in difference; by dividing people along the lines of race, it used difference as a source of fear and as a means of separation. A few years ago, while speaking about the *FrontLines* Project at a conference in Chile<sup>90</sup>, Tamar, Marié-Heleen, and I were taken to task by an American member of the audience for ‘reducing all suffering to sameness’, which he saw as ‘banal’ and simplistic. He felt that we were devaluing and undermining the validity of the suffering we sought to depict, by reducing it to a common denominator. We were all somewhat taken aback, and hurt by the accusation. My response at the time was the only one I could make; I explained that when you come from a country whose history is premised almost entirely on the idea of difference, then finding commonality, finding the ways in which we are all connected, is an important project<sup>91</sup>. For us, this was an imperative part of what we were trying to do; we were trying to remind ourselves and our students that suffering is universal, but so is grace, and by engaging with what we have called a ‘theatre of humanity’, (Coetzee, Meskin, & Van der Walt, 2014), we were able to break down some of the barriers between us. This was a response to our past, but also a hope for our future.

## *2. Self-Study is Aimed at the Improvement of Practice*

As I pointed out in Chapter 2, it was hard to work out exactly what kind of improvement of practice this study would lead to. As I reach the end of my study, however, it is apparent

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<sup>90</sup> Interestingly, and probably because of their own deeply difficult history, our Chilean colleagues have always shown an enormous depth of understanding and appreciation for our work.

<sup>91</sup> To his credit, he had the grace to immediately respond that this changed his perspective on the work, and he withdrew his comment.



that my understanding of my own practice has been enormously changed by the process of examining it in such fine detail. Greater understanding of what I do and why I do it allows me the agency to be able to use my collaborative theatre-making practice to greater effect. One example of this is the way in which I have conceived of the 'selves' that I identify in Chapter 8; thus, an understanding of myself as the 'Watcher self' allows me to use my powers of observation more effectively and clearly in my work, instead of seeing them as a weakness; an understanding of myself as the 'Flawed self' allows me to consider the ways in which I can address some of these flaws, by being more assertive about my ideas, and bringing greater confidence in myself to my practice. As I have come to this improved understanding, I have been able to articulate much of the tacit and implicit knowledge embodied in my practice. Thus, I have transmuted the knowing 'in my bones' that is rooted in my practice, and generated by process and experience, into the publicly accessible knowledge that is set out in this thesis. In this process of coming to know about my practice, I have embraced Sandra Weber's notion that "Self-knowledge is power; sharing self-knowledge is empowering" (Weber, 2014, p. 17), and so in developing a deeper understanding of my practice, I am more empowered to use that practice in meaningful ways.

I have also come to a better understanding of what is important in my practice, which has changed the way in which I see it. I have grown to understand that my practice of collaborative theatre-making is not simply the 'fun' part of my work as a teacher; rather, it is the heart of it. What I am teaching and learning while making a piece of theatre collaboratively is as important as (if not more than) what I teach in the formal classroom situation. I have also come to understand that who I am in the rehearsal room is different from who I am in the classroom, to some degree. My occasional uneasiness with my position as a White, middle-class, privileged, over-educated, and Westernized woman, teaching classes of largely Black, underprivileged, disadvantaged African students, where I am sometimes acutely aware of the gulf of difference in our lived experience, disappears in the rehearsal room. In that space of 'betweenness', we are all on the same journey together, seeking to co-create and co-construct meaning and life out of words on a page.

The differences between us are not erased, but in sharing in the creative process of theatre-making, our focus is shifted to what we share, rather than what separates us.

On the other hand, part of the improvement aspect of this work also has to do with an improved understanding of how collaboration actually works in a theatrical context. I am by no means implying that my understanding is a definitive one; it is too specific to my own context for that. Nevertheless, it is my hope that this work will contribute to the conversation about how and why we collaborate as theatre-makers, and broaden the scope of understanding for theatre-makers and educators alike.

By the same token, I am also aware that this study is not ‘complete’; like any other study, there are ‘gaps’ in my thinking, areas that I have been unable to delve into, moments of blindness on my own part, which may at a later stage become clearer. I am comforted by the fact that I am not alone in this; my friend Liz Harrison articulates this best when she elucidates “the problem of doctoral study that aims to uncover, reveal or trouble accepted understandings of a phenomenon. It can never close all the gaps it opens – even simply the ones that the researcher sees” (Harrison, 2009, pp. 302-303). Like Liz, I acknowledge that this thesis as a step in an ongoing process, another iteration of the *FrontLines* Project that allows us to see it in a different light, and which carries us forward to new and innovative ideas and avenues of inquiry<sup>92</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> Some of these include an evaluation of the Q-sort (John-Steiner, 2000) as a tool for analysing collaboration, a consideration of the concept of Deep Learning as it relates to the *FrontLines* Project, and a more detailed investigation of the nexus of power in collaborative theatre-making, among other avenues which I have been unable to grapple with here.

### *3. Self-Study is a Collaborative, Interactive Process*

At its heart, this study is dialogic; like my collaborative theatre-making process, it has evolved out of dialogue with Tamar, with Marié-Heleen, and with the student participants. It is in lively discussion that my ideas have evolved, and my insights have been gained. When I looked at the transcripts of all my interviews, what stood out for me was the fact that it was not only the responses of my collaborators and the students that were revealing; my own words also revealed a host of hidden insights and ideas that I didn't even know I had. In asking the questions, in engaging in dialogue, I was able to make meaning of my own work. By extending this interaction to include the theoretical understandings gleaned from my reading, I have placed what can be known from theory in dialogue with what can be known from practice, to generate new meanings in a "commingling of analytical and artistic ways of knowing" (Conquergood, 2002, p. 151).

### *4. Self-Study uses Transparent, Multiple Qualitative Methods*

An important part of this study has been making the thinking *in* my practice and the thinking *about* my practice visible, both through the critical questions themselves, and the ways in which I have chosen to answer them. In so doing, I have been able to construct what Mishler calls an 'exemplar', in which "theory and analysis are in a continuing dialectic with each other and with the data, and the process is open to us" (Mishler, 1990, p. 438). By making my methods and my meaning-making 'open' to the reader, through the use of visual mapping and by using direct quotations from the data, I am able to fulfil Mishler's demand for "articulating and clarifying the features and methods of our studies, of showing how the work is done and what problems become accessible to study" (Mishler, 1990, p. 423). In paying close attention not only to the *what* and the *why* of my research, but also to the *how* of my study, I have engaged with Mishler's notion that "learning from exemplars is a process of contextually grounded practice" (Mishler, 1990, p. 437). Thus, despite the fact that my findings are not generalizable, being too closely bound to the context of my own

work, the way in which I have set out to find the answers in my study may help to point other self-reflexive researchers, theatre-makers, and teachers to methods and means for answering questions about their own work.

##### *5. Validation of the Research is through Examples and Making the Findings and Knowledge Generated Public.*

A great deal of the way in which I have handled validity in this thesis has been in the process of making my thinking about my *doing*, and my thinking about my *thinking*, visible through the process of visual mapping, as well as through the ways in which I have used both theory and data in constructing my argument. As such, I have engaged in a meta-cognitive, self-reflexive process of examining my thinking, and building an “awareness of and knowledge about [my] own cognition” (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 214). In the Revision of Bloom’s Taxonomy, the highest level of the Knowledge dimension is Metacognitive Knowledge (to use Krathwohl’s (2002) term), which implies “Strategic Knowledge; Knowledge about cognitive tasks, including appropriate contextual and conditional knowledge; and Self-Knowledge” (Krathwohl, 2002, p. 214). This implies that knowledge about thinking and about the self lie at the crux of this ‘meta’ level of knowing.

Thus, in thinking about my practice, and in carefully mapping my process of coming to know through this thesis, I have made public the meta-cognitive and deeply embodied ways of knowing that my practice entails. In so doing, I have embraced Dwight Conquergood’s notion of knowledge that lies “Betwixt and between theory and theatricality, paradigms and practices, critical reflection and creative accomplishment” (2002, p. 151). This has allowed me to consider myself as both a ‘knower’ of practice, and a ‘knower’ about that knowing itself, as I have sought to uncover my practice through this inquiry.

## *The Crystal*

While I was thinking about how to end this thesis, my younger son brought me a treasure, something he had dug up out of his toy boxes, and which he wanted to show me. It was a crystal, bought on a trip to Namibia a few years ago. It is not a particularly beautiful example, but as I looked at it, I realized that it was the perfect metaphor for my study<sup>93</sup>, and the ways in which I have crystallized (Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005) my thoughts and ideas in this thesis.



*Figure 44: The crystal.*

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<sup>93</sup> In using this crystal in this way, I am inspired by Anastasia Samaras' ideas about using research artifacts in self-study (Samaras, 2011), as well as the work that Tamar and I, along with a number of colleagues, have done in considering the importance of objects in our creative and research work (Meskin, van der Walt, Scott, de Beer, & Pithouse-Morgan, 2017).

Rising out of the base of the crystal, which is made up of a large number of small crystals closely grouped together, are three clear 'points', one for each of the sections of my thesis. These points all interconnect at their base, and arise out of the same mass; they are interdependent and deeply connected, despite appearing to be separate. In each of these 'points', light refracts and reflects, allowing us to see into and around them in multiple ways. To me, this crystal epitomises the ways in which my study has allowed me to cast light onto and into my collaborative theatre-making practice, and it shows the ways in which my understandings have grown and evolved as my study has progressed. Each of the three points denotes the way in which I have examined my practice through different lenses, trying to understand and reflect upon my own collaborative theatre-making practice. The crystal also demonstrates that the three larger points are surrounded by a multitude of other, smaller points, each denoting the multiple and myriad ways of thinking about and understanding my practice that have arisen in this study. Thus, as my thesis reaches its natural end, and as I conclude the three sections which have sought to answer my critical questions, I can see that I have 'crystallized' a new way of seeing my work, and understanding my self-in-action.

### *So, what about the 'so what'?*

The most important of these crystallizations, and the one that brings all my ideas together, is the last one I have reached in my study. At the very beginning of this thesis, I set out to understand "the educational implications of my work as director, theatre-maker, and educator"<sup>94</sup>. It is in conceiving of my collaborative theatre-making practice, as embodied in the *FrontLines* Project, as a complex Zone of Proximal Development, a 'Zone of Zones', that I am able to understand this educational impact, and articulate the 'so what' of this thesis. My three critical questions can all be seen to be 'nested' one inside each other, within the

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<sup>94</sup> See p. 1.

frame of the notion of the ZPD. In seeing my practice in this way, I am able to encompass all the varied aspects of my theatre-making practice in one clear understanding, which I could call my theory of collaborative theatre-making:

**In the intersectional space of ‘betweenness’ (Murray, 2016) in which my self and my collaborators and students work, we create a complex Zone of Proximal Development, a ‘Zone of Zones’ in which we are all both teachers and learners simultaneously, where we can grow and develop in a space of ‘becoming’ (Holzman, 2009) as collaborators and co-constructors of meaning. In this Zone of Proximal Development which is created by and constituted in my collaborative theatre-making practice, we are all both knower and learner, teacher and student, leader and follower, more capable peer and less capable peer, thinker and doer. In this “force field...[of] the spatial and dialectical ‘betweenness’ of collaboration” (Murray, 2016, p. 36), we all bring our own “funds of knowledge” (Moll, 2014) and “lived emotional experience” (John-Steiner, Connery, & Marjanovic-Shane, 2010, p. 8) to bear as we engage in processes of mutual appropriation, and help each other to learn and develop in ways that we would not be able to do on our own, . The socially constructed knowledge that is embedded in, and and arises out of our collaborative theatre-making practice becomes internalised and ‘owned’ in a lasting way by all the participants. In this way the process of collaborative theatre-making becomes a developmental process in which affective skills, critical thinking skills, communication skills, creative skills, and cognitive skills are grown and expanded.**

Thus, I am able to see the ways in which I enact my collaborative theatre-making practice, the inner workings of my creative collaboration with others, and the ways in which I both teach and learn in my practice, as all being aspects of the broader ‘Zone of Zones’ that envelops the *FrontLines* Project. The ZPD of my collaborative theatre-making practice includes the full range of my ‘selves’ as artist, teacher, and researcher, in dialogue with each other, and with others. Because of the shared thinking, mutual appropriation,

interdependence, and affective support afforded by the ZPD, my collaborators, the students we work with, and I are all able to engage with “the potential of stretching one’s identity through partnership, through sustained and varied action, through the interweaving of social and individual processes” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 188). All the ‘selves’ that I have conceived of in this study; the Stage Manager self, the Mother self, the Watcher self, the Thinking self, the Artist self, the Flawed self, the Teaching self, and the Learning self; are all constituted in and through the ZPD, as I construct and stretch my self-in-action through my practice.

In developing this particular understanding of my collaborative theatre-making practice, I have engaged in building new knowledge that is both “anchored in practice and circulated within a performance community”, and “anchored in paradigm and secured in print” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 146); knowledge that “pull[s] the pin on the binary opposition between theory and practice” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 145). Thus, like much research in Performance Studies, the knowledge produced in my study bridges the gap between knowing “from above” and knowing “from the ground level, in the thick of things” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 146). In thinking about the making of a piece of theatre as a ZPD from the perspective of both “intimate, hands-on participation” and “empirical observation and critical analysis” (Conquergood, 2002, p. 146), I am extending the notion of how theatre works, and how it teaches, in ways that I hope will add to the conversation about this most ancient, and yet still relevant art-form. While there is some consideration of Vygotsky’s work in the literature of Drama and Theatre in Education, and Applied Theatre, I have never seen the process of devising a work of theatre, or a particular theatrical project, characterised as a ZPD in this way, and so my study opens up a new way of seeing our work as theatre-makers, and a new avenue of knowing about our practice, that will encourage us to consider what we do through a new lens.



## *Last thoughts and New Wonderings*

In conceiving of the *FrontLines* Project as a ZPD, I also connecting to one of the most interesting conversations in Education today, which centres around what and how we need to teach in order to equip young people for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As Ken Robinson (2011) has famously pointed out, the world is changing so very fast that the students of today will have careers that simply don't exist yet, even in our imaginations. How then can we teach them the skills they will need for their work? The simple answer is that we can't. If I extrapolate this out to my own discipline, it is clear that the future of entertainment, of film, television, and theatre are all difficult to predict. The proliferation of digital technologies, and the rapidly changing ways in which the audience 'consumes' or accesses entertainment, among others, will continue to change the shape of our art form as the century progresses. We cannot predict these changes, and so we cannot teach directly for them.

Instead, we are challenged to think about what skills these young people will need to survive and thrive in this rapidly changing world. The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning has identified 4 key skills that they believe should be the focus of both what and how we teach, which they refer to as the 4c's: Creativity, Critical Thinking, Collaboration, and Communication (2016). Allied to this is the reconfiguration of Bloom's Taxonomy, that now sees 'Creating' as its key cognitive process (Krathwohl, 2002). In both cases, these criteria articulate the great need in our world for people who can find problems we don't even know we have yet. Steve Jobs famously said that "people don't know what they want until you show it to them" (in Burrows, 1998); to be able to show people what they want, you need to be able to use foresight and problem-finding skills, to see the problems that don't yet exist, and lead innovative thinking for the future.

In thinking about the 'Zone of Zones' of the *FrontLines* Project, we have already seen the many ways in which the project was able to engage with all of these critical skills. In working

collaboratively, in the creative act of making something new, my collaborators and I, and the students we worked with, were challenged to communicate clearly, think critically, work collaboratively, and be creative. In the generation of an emergent product, we found new problems and solved them, through a process of shared thinking and co-creation of meaning. Thus, the *FrontLines* Project is far more than just a theatrical performance; between us and around us, in the “zone of magic” (John-Steiner, 2000, p. 191) of our collaborative theatre-making practice, we create an intersectional space of teaching and learning, growth and development, that can equip all of us to think together, and act together, as “Together, we create our futures” (John-Steiner, Creative Collaboration, 2000, p. 204).

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## Appendix 1 – Ethical Clearance



14 February 2013

Mrs Tanya Lenore van der Walt 901306220  
School of Education - Language and Arts Education  
Edgewood Campus

Protocol reference number: HSS/0076/013D  
Project title: Embodied knowledge, teaching, and learning in collaborative theatre-making: a self-study

Dear Mrs van der Walt

### Expedited Approval

I wish to inform you that your application has been granted Full Approval through an expedited review process.

Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment/modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number. Please note: Research data should be securely stored in the school/department for a period of 5 years.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

.....  
Professor Steven Collings (Chair)  
/px

cc Supervisor Dr Lorraine Singh  
cc Academic leader Dr MN Davids and Dr R Mudaly  
cc School Administrator Ms Bengokile Bhengu

Professor S Collings (Chair)  
Humanities & Social Sc Research Ethics Committee  
Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building  
Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban, 4000, South Africa  
Telephone: +27 (0)31 260 3587/8350 Facsimile: +27 (0)31 260 4609 Email: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za / snymanm@ukzn.ac.za  
Founding Campuses: ■ Edgewood ■ Howard College ■ Medical School ■ Pietermaritzburg ■ Westville

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## *Appendix 2 – Example of Informed Consent Letter and Form*

### *LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT: COLLABORATOR PARTICIPANTS*

Date

Dear

As you may know, I am currently working on my PhD in Education, with the topic **Embodied knowledge, teaching, and learning in collaborative theatre-making: a self-study**. I would like to include you in the study.

The project involves the examination of my own collaborative theatre-making process, with specific reference to the *FrontLines* project, which forms the focal case-study of my study. My purpose is to analyse my own practice of collaboration and make explicit the specific embodied knowledge(s) that underpin the acts of collaboration that I undertake with you, my collaborators, instinctively and implicitly, in order to understand what both we and our students learn from the process of collaboration.

I want to gain a deeper understanding of how I collaborate with others, why our collaborations work in the way that they do, and what is happening under the surface of that collaboration. In so doing, I hope to be able to provide an understanding of how collaborative work can create a space for teaching and learning, functioning as a critical, dialogic pedagogy.

Since you have been involved as my collaborator in the *FrontLines* project, I would like to invite you to share your experiences with me.

If you agree to participate, I will be asking you to engage in verbal discussions with me about your own view of how and why we collaborate in the way that we do. All interviews will be transcribed, and sessions will also be videotaped for my personal use and for possible use in the final thesis as examples. Should you agree to your image being used in the thesis, please indicate by checking the relevant box on the informed consent form. If you do not want your image to be used, I will ensure that the videotape of your session is only used for my personal research and your identity will be protected.

Should you agree to participate, I will do my utmost to keep your input confidential. However, since the data is based on a project in which your involvement is already known, it may not be possible to guarantee anonymity. If you do not want your identity to be revealed, I will endeavour to ensure that it is not, by using pseudonyms and masking any visual material utilised; however, people who may have seen the production may be able to deduce your identity from the discussion. I hope this will not prevent your participation. If you do not mind your identity being revealed, please indicate by checking the relevant box on the informed consent form. If you wish to remain anonymous, I will ensure that your information is only used for my personal research.

You will be given the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of any transcripts and to add or clarify any points that you wish to make.

Please be aware that your participation is not compulsory and that you are at liberty to decline or to withdraw from the process at any time. Data collected will be retained for a period of 5 years and then destroyed.

If you have any questions regarding the study, or would like any additional information, please contact me on 0721427502 or via email at [tanyalvdw@gmail.com](mailto:tanyalvdw@gmail.com) . You may also contact my supervisor, Dr Lorraine Singh on (031)260-3445 or via email at [Singhl4@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Singhl4@ukzn.ac.za).

I can assure you that the study has been reviewed and has received ethical clearance from the Research Committee at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

I hope that you do agree to participate and look forward to speaking with you and sharing your experiences and insights. Thank you in advance for your assistance with my research.

Kind regards

TANYA VAN DER WALT

## LETTER OF INFORMED CONSENT: EX-STUDENTS

Date

Dear

As you may know, I am currently working on my PhD in Education, with the topic **Embodied knowledge, teaching, and learning in collaborative theatre-making: a self-study**. I would like to include you in the study.

The project involves the examination of my own collaborative theatre-making process, with specific reference to the *FrontLines* project, which forms the focal case-study of my study. My purpose is to analyse my own practice of collaboration and make explicit the specific embodied knowledge(s) that underpin the acts of collaboration that I undertake with my collaborators, instinctively and implicitly, in order to understand what both we and our students learn from the process of collaboration.

I want to gain a deeper understanding of how I collaborate with others, why our collaborations work in the way that they do, and what is happening under the surface of that collaboration. In so doing, I hope to be able to provide an understanding of how collaborative work can create a space for teaching and learning, functioning as a critical, dialogic pedagogy.

Since you have been involved as a cast member in one or more of the incarnations of the *FrontLines* project, I would like to invite you to share your experiences with me.

If you agree to participate, I will be asking you to engage in verbal discussions with me about your own view of the collaborative theatre-making process, through a personal interview, and a focus-group discussion with other cast members. All interviews will be transcribed, and sessions will also be videotaped for my personal use and for possible use in the final thesis as examples. Should you agree to your image being used in the thesis, please indicate by checking the relevant box on the informed consent form. If you do not want your image to be used, I will ensure that the videotape of your session is only used for my personal research and your identity will be protected.

Should you agree to participate, I will do my utmost to keep your input confidential. However, since the data is based on a project in which your involvement is already known, it may not be possible to guarantee anonymity. If you do not want your identity to be revealed, I will endeavour to ensure that it is not, by using pseudonyms and masking any visual material utilised; however, people who may have seen the production may be able to deduce your identity from the discussion. I hope this will not prevent your participation. If you do not mind your identity being revealed, please indicate by checking the relevant box on the informed consent form. If you wish to remain anonymous, I will ensure that your information is only used for my personal research.

You will be given the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of any transcripts and to add or clarify any points that you wish to make.

Please be aware that your participation is not compulsory and that you are at liberty to decline or to withdraw from the process at any time. Data collected will be retained for a period of 5 years and then destroyed.

If you have any questions regarding the study, or would like any additional information, please contact me on 0721427502 or via email at [tanyalvdw@gmail.com](mailto:tanyalvdw@gmail.com). You may also contact my supervisor, Dr Lorraine Singh on (031)260-3445 or via email at [Singhl4@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Singhl4@ukzn.ac.za).

I can assure you that the study has been reviewed and has received ethical clearance from the Research Committee at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

I hope that you do agree to participate and look forward to speaking with you and sharing your experiences and insights. Thank you in advance for your assistance with my research.

Kind regards

TANYA VAN DER WALT

## *SAMPLE OF PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM*

**TITLE OF STUDY:**      **Embodied knowledge, teaching, and learning in collaborative theatre-making: a self-study.**

**RESEARCHER:**        **Tanya van der Walt**

**SUPERVISOR:**        **Dr Lorraine Singh**

I, \_\_\_\_\_(full name of participant) hereby confirm that I have read the information letter about the study being conducted by Tanya van der Walt at the University of KwaZulu-Natal as part of her doctoral research. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and to receive clarification.

I am aware that I will be asked to participate in interview and/or focus group sessions, or will be invited to comment on the writing up of the thesis. I am aware that all interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed, and that sessions will also be videotaped. I am aware that excerpts from my participation may be used in the thesis and any subsequent publications. I have been informed that I will be given the opportunity to read all transcripts and view any material that is going to be included in the thesis.

I am aware that owing to the nature of the study it may not be possible to guarantee anonymity but that the researcher will endeavour to protect my identity should I so require.

I have been advised that I may withdraw at any time from the project



I agree to participate in the study: ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree to have my interview videotaped: ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree that my image may be used: ☐ Yes ☐ No

I agree that quotations from my participation may be used: ☐ Yes ☐ No

I do not mind if my identity is revealed: ☐ Yes ☐ No

Participant Signature:

---

Participant Name:

---

Witness Signature:

---

Witness Name:

---

Date:

---

### Appendix 3 – Collaboration Q-sort Statements

Adapted from Vera John-Steiner's *Creative Collaboration* (2000)<sup>95</sup>.

I rely upon my collaborator to connect observation and data with my theoretical constructs	I don't think a project is as valuable when someone else helps
I like to write down my ideas before I share them with others	Clarity and sequential logic are essential to my collaborative work
I do my best work alone	My collaborator is more involved with the details than I am
I don't have the patience to define a problem by thinking with another person	My collaborator and I have matched our work rhythms in order to do our work
When I'm working with my collaborator on a project, my personal life becomes far less important	My collaborator needs my total attention when we are discussing an issue, while I can attend to several things at once
My collaborator and I need to schedule ample time for integrating our diverse approaches	Collaboration helps me to overcome the loneliness of individual work
Sometimes it is important to get away from our normal environment to discuss our project and ideas	I try to construct a working climate where our time and privacy are protected
I sometimes need time away from my collaborator and a chance to work on my individual work	My collaborator is brilliant and also domineering
I prefer to have written specification of what	I seem to overwhelm my collaborator with

---

<sup>95</sup> There were a few statements that did not apply to my practice and my study in any way, and so these were left out of this list.

is to be accomplished	my pace and expectations
Because of our collaboration I frequently fail to receive credit for my accomplishments	There must be an aesthetic quality to the project in order for me to work on it
I wish my collaborator would ask me before discussing our work with other colleagues	My preferred working style does not blend easily with my collaborator(s)
My collaborator and I are both capable of working long hours	I don't have to explain myself to my collaborator, I can just use key words
The process of thinking together with my collaborator was informal in the beginning	Sometimes my collaborator's visibility affects our relationship negatively
Excessive criticism causes a collaboration to fail	Sometimes my collaborator and I exchange ideas while we walk
In a good collaborative environment, one's ideas can be made explicit through questioning and dialogue	With my collaborator, I am more careful about the way I challenge his/her ideas
Sometimes my collaborator and I do different parts of the same project	My collaborator is able to function amongst clutter, while I need to have everything neat and orderly
I expect my collaborator to be a critic of my work	Sometimes I draw pictures when I start working on a new collaborative project
My collaborator and I rarely argue over methods	My collaborator and I write together at the word processor
My collaborator creates theoretical models to help our thinking processes	With my collaborator, I can talk at the speed of thinking
I need an orderly environment to carry out my work	My collaborator is able to make observations which make a situation immediately clear
I become totally immersed in one project while my collaborator is able to manage several	By the time we have finished a project, we do not know from whom the ideas came
I rarely work with any one individual over long periods of time	My collaborator spurs me on to complete the project

With my collaborator, there is a sense of mission to establish a community in which we can participate

My collaborator cannot discuss ideas without visually representing them, while I rely on language

## Appendix 4 - Q-sort response spreadsheets

Tamar's Q-Sort Responses					
STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL / MIDDLE GROUND	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	LEFT OUT / INVALID
With my collaborator, I can talk at the speed of thinking	My collaborator is able to make observations which make a situation immediately clear	Sometimes I draw pictures when I start working on a new collaborative project	I do my best work alone	I become totally immersed in one project while my collaborator is able to manage several	Excessive criticism causes a collaboration to fail
By the time we have finished a project, we do not know from whom the ideas came	My collaborator spurs me on to complete the project	Because of our collaboration I frequently fail to receive credit for my accomplishments	Clarity and sequential logic are essential to my collaborative work	My collaborator is more involved with the details than I am	My collaborator needs my total attention when we are discussing an issue, while I can attend to several
Collaboration helps me to overcome the loneliness of individual work	In a good collaborative environment, one's ideas can be made explicit through questioning and dialogue	I sometimes need time away from my collaborator and a chance to work on my individual work	I try to construct a working climate where our time and privacy are protected	My collaborator is able to function amongst clutter, while I need to have everything neat and orderly	My collaborator is brilliant and also domineering
Sometimes it is important to get away from our normal environment to discuss our project and ideas	Sometimes my collaborator and I exchange ideas while we walk	I like to write down my ideas before I share them with others	With my collaborator, I am more careful about the way I challenge his/her ideas	My collaborator creates theoretical models to help our thinking processes	
My collaborator and I are both capable of working long hours	I seem to overwhelm my collaborator with my pace and expectations		I don't have the patience to define a problem by thinking with another person	My collaborator and I need to schedule ample time for integrating our diverse approaches	
With my collaborator, there is a sense of mission to establish a community in which we can participate	My collaborator and I have matched our work rhythms in order to do our work		Sometimes my collaborator's visibility affects our relationship negatively	I rarely work with any one individual over long periods of time	
When I'm working with my collaborator on a project, my personal life becomes far less important	My collaborator and I rarely argue over methods			My preferred working style does not blend easily with my collaborator(s)	
There must be an aesthetic quality to the project in order for me to work on it				My collaborator cannot discuss ideas without visually representing them, while I rely on language	
The process of thinking together with my collaborator was informal in the beginning				I don't think a project is as valuable when someone else helps	
I expect my collaborator to be a critic of my work				I prefer to have written specification of what is to be accomplished	
I rely upon my collaborator to connect observation and data with my theoretical constructs				I need an orderly environment to carry out my work	
Sometimes my collaborator and I do different parts of the same project				I wish my collaborator would ask me before discussing our work with other colleagues	
I don't have to explain myself to my collaborator, I can just use key words					
My collaborator and I write together at the word					

Marie-Helen's Q-Sort Responses					
STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEUTRAL / MIDDLE GROUND	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	LEFT OUT / INVALID
The process of thinking together with my collaborator was informal in the beginning	My collaborator spurs me on to complete the project	With my collaborator, I can talk at the speed of thinking	My collaborator and I have matched our work rhythms in order to do our	My collaborator is brilliant and also domineering	I don't think a project is as valuable when someone else
Sometimes it is important to get away from our normal environment to discuss our project and ideas	Collaboration helps me to overcome the loneliness of individual work	My collaborator and I need to schedule ample time for integrating our diverse approaches	My collaborator and I rarely argue over methods	My collaborator needs my total attention when we are discussing an issue, while I can	Sometimes my collaborator's visibility affects our relationship negatively
I expect my collaborator to be a critic of my work	There must be an aesthetic quality to the project in order for me to work on it	My collaborator is more involved with the details than I am	I need an orderly environment to carry out my work	I don't have the patience to define a problem by thinking	I seem to overwhelm my collaborator with my pace and
By the time we have finished a project, we do not know from whom the ideas came	Sometimes I draw pictures when I start working on a new collaborative project	My collaborator is able to make observations which make a situation immediately clear	I sometimes need time away from my collaborator and a chance to work on my individual work	My collaborator creates theoretical models to help our thinking processes	I rarely work with any one individual over long periods of time
My collaborator and I write together at the word processor	My preferred working style does not blend easily with my collaborator(s)	I try to construct a working climate where our time and privacy are protected	My collaborator is able to function amongst clutter, while I need to have everything neat and orderly	I like to write down my ideas before I share them with others	Because of our collaboration I frequently fail to receive credit for my accomplishments
Sometimes my collaborator and I exchange ideas while we walk		I don't have to explain myself to my collaborator, I can just use key words	I rely upon my collaborator to connect observation and data with my theoretical constructs	Clarity and sequential logic are essential to my collaborative work	I prefer to have written specification of what is to be accomplished
With my collaborator, there is a sense of mission to establish a community in which we can		With my collaborator, I am more careful about the way I challenge	Excessive criticism causes a collaboration to fail	I do my best work alone	
When I'm working with my collaborator on a project, my personal life becomes far less important				I become totally immersed in one project while my collaborator is able to manage	
My collaborator and I are both capable of working long hours				My collaborator cannot discuss ideas without visually representing them, while I rely	
Sometimes my collaborator and I do different parts of the same project				I wish my collaborator would ask me before discussing our work with other colleagues	
In a good collaborative environment, one's ideas can be made explicit through questioning and					

## *Appendix 5 – Interview Schedule for Student Participants*

In interviewing the student participants, I used the following questions:

- What was the most rewarding or difficult part of the *FrontLines* experience?
- Did you feel like you were a collaborator in the process of creating *Frontlines*? Why?
- What are the challenges / advantages of working with more than one director?
- Did your involvement in the *FrontLines* project change your ideas about your own creative work in any way?
- How did your experience of the *FrontLines* project change, from one iteration to another?
- Do you think your involvement in the *FrontLines* project changed you in any way? If so, how?
- What do you think you learned from the directors of the project?
- What do you think you learnt from each other as cast members?
- What are your most enduring memories of the process of creating *FrontLines*? Which moments stand out for you?

## Appendix 6 – Turnitin Report

### Turnitin Originality Report

Processed on: 02-Aug-2018 12:07 PM CAT  
ID: 987028892  
Word Count: 104855  
Submitted: 1

Similarity Index		Similarity by Source	
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Co-directing, Co-creating, Collaborating: a self-reflexive study of my collaborative theatre-making practice By Tanya Van der Walt

1% match (publications)

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<https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007%2F978-1-4020-6545-3.pdf>

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