

Surfacing Assumptions via ‘Metaxic’ Method: An arts-based method for team fieldwork

Introduction

Bodies house complex layers of emotion, memories; they shelter personal knowledges (Meyer, 2008). Bodies navigate complex terrains, managing internal tensions in order to deliver externally perceived performances of self (Dror, 1999; Porter, 2001). Bodies are trained, kinaesthetically, cognitively, to deliver performances through repetition and experience, like teaching a child to cover their mouth when they cough, and say ‘excuse me’ when they burp. We learn the socio-cultural-political expectations that underpin our perlocutionary acts (Austin, 1962), through immersion. These performative scripts may lay un-interrogated and un-conscious to us, hidden by habitual practices that embody their own determinable truth. So, what happens in the act of researching as we set out to create spaces for participants to explore ideas, topics and questions? How are these spaces we create already inscribed by theoretical and epistemological assumptions? And how do these assumptions influence or impact the possibility of what can be achieved in the performance of research? In this paper we seek to both demonstrate a methodological process that aims to surface research

assumptions before fieldwork thereby creating a more conscious and spacious sphere for team qualitative focus group fieldwork.

Performance is an essentially contested concept (Strine et al., 1990); sometimes seen as a spectrum of possibilities from the micro lens of performance art and its aesthetic analysis to a macro view of the performance of culture in society (Carlson, 2004). We are interested in how performance frames reality, like an ‘organizing principle for setting apart social events’ (Carlson, 2004: 35). Forms of socially driven theatre, like Augusto Boal’s ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ or Bertolt Brecht’s ‘Epic Theatre’, require the performers to inter-act with their worldview before they emerge liberated from oppressive reality to act upon the world (Freire, 1970). As researchers we are interested in the macro view of the performance of culture; that performance is a component of the discursive construction of society. Exploring the framing of our individual methodological practices by bringing a dramaturgical treatment, we aim to consciously surface assumptions that underpin our contemporary research practice, disrupting our own, and each other’s, implicit methodological perspectives.

This paper employs a critically reflexive approach to examine how our theatre training, and its associated genealogy of knowledge, has shaped the theory and practice upon which each author has built their professional career: one an Indigenous leadership scholar, the other a writer/performer and Yoga teacher. Despite divergent career trajectories, and discipline specificity, we have discovered, after a twenty-year

separation, we continue to share a common language and set of values pertaining to how we work. We share an artistic education that has disciplined both our bodies and our minds to reproduce received ‘discourses and assumptions’ (Zarrilli, 2005). Our training took place in a regional town in eastern Australia in the early 1990s, in our late teenage years. The Bachelor degree in theatre was/is driven by a collective of (male) theatre practitioners committed to social justice principles, physical theatre and the works of Brecht¹, Boal², Freire³ and Heathcote⁴. These luminaries and their associated popular education pedagogy and emancipatory political agendas served as role models for our theatre development.

Focusing less on the analysis of performance/performer skills than on patterned codes of behavior (Carlson, 2004), we aim to demonstrate the connection between our young impressionable selves, passionately interested in social change, and how these embodied ways of understanding the world shape our methodological perspectives. We demonstrate these connections in three ways – first in anticipation of fieldwork we employ a performative writing process that is interrupted by use of an adapted theatre game (Boal’s Cop in the Head), and second, as a guide for our fieldwork interactions with focus group participants we aim to demonstrate the ‘metaxic method’ derived from Boal’s (1995) notion of *metaxis*, the act of living in both the real and imagined worlds simultaneously. Finally we show how through a partial experience of other (a central part in the metaxic method) the spontaneity of *communitas* emerges when the group is

released from the formal space of research into an informal togetherness in community (Pöyhönen, 2018). These dramaturgical methods highlight our tacit preference for performative communication as we examine the consequential influence early ideological ways of knowing have on the shape of our individual methodological research choices and how surfacing them pre-fieldwork allows research teams to consciously achieve a 'role distance' as researchers move fluidly between 'first-person participation and third-person observation' (Carroll and Cameron, 2005).

As scholars interested in the performance of culture - one through the discipline of leadership, the other through the lens of entertainment - we find that we are, now, consciously committed to research with those subversively resistant to hetero-cultural normative practices. We seek to uphold research participants' performances of difference in our research programs. What we offer here is a critical reflection on how performative research, evidenced through our devised step-by-step pre-field method, helps unpack underlying, often ideological, assumptions. By performing our critical reflection in the presence of (each) other, we construct a methodological framework to explore our unconscious perlocutionary acts. Further, the dramaturgical method provides a structured process to surface biases and differences between each other, and in us. In doing so, we prepare to perform and experience difference in the group fieldwork setting. This experience is a critical mirroring of our theoretical/political commitments from our shared education. It is also an opportunity, through having a

partial experience of 'other' to consider the potential collective and community dimensions possible to achieve through research.

Culture and Performance

Over the past decade, performance research has broadened its scope of analysis to other disciplines including cultural studies, ethnography, sociology, geographical and anthropological studies (Carlson, 2004). The study of performance has evolved to include '... ways of comprehending how humans fundamentally make culture, affect power and reinvent ways of being in the world' (Madison and Hamera, 2006: xii). Dwight Conquergood (2002: 152) views the analysis of performance as a method '... to braid together disparate and stratified ways of knowing'. For performance scholars, recognition of and study concerned with what Foucault (1972) refers to as the 'subjugated knowledge' provides a process for non-hegemonic cultural performance to 'reveal itself to itself, in the process of doing' (Johnson, 2006). Demonstrated cultural practices that are viewed as inferior knowledges like '... the local, regional, vernacular, naïve knowledges at the bottom of the hierarchy...' (Conquergood, 2002: 146) are the focus of both authors research agendas.

We situate our methodological examination in a dramaturgical frame (Goffman, 1990). Not strictly using performance ethnography to explore socio-political dimensions of identity performance and social construction (Denzin, 2003), we have gravitated

towards Schechner's (2002) explanation of 'restored behaviours' because it opens the space between being and doing. This in-between space is pivotal to our examination of the links between the social and cultural construction of our research behaviours, and conscious and unconscious behaviours that hint at underlying assumptions that guide our research. Schechner argues that the restored behaviour is both symbolic and reflexive:

Physical or verbal, or virtual actions that are not-for-the first-time; that are prepared or rehearsed. A person may not be aware that she is performing a strip of restored behaviour (2002: 29).

The 'performative utterance' described by Butler (1993) is part of a process of repetition, whereby bodily gestures, movements and enactments repeat themselves into disappearance or invisibility, making behaviour appear natural. All utterances are performative acts according to Butler, for the 'doing' of the word is the act of informing. Performative utterances are a 'reiteration of the norm or set of norms' constructed within the codes and conventions of an individual's culture (1993: 129). They are performed as part of an ongoing embodiment of inherited behaviours. Our interest in the reiteration of norms through the performance of culture, and from an individual perspective the performance of identities, is to shine a light on normalised assumptions that tacitly guide our methodological choices. Butler's work on stylized repetitious acts can be extended to consider the performativity of research.

Performativity as a mode of working that both primes the researcher to be alive to the situation they construct on a moment by moment basis, as well as maintaining a critically appreciative lens on self (Markussen, 2005).

More recently Bleeker, Sherman and Nedelkopoulou (2015: 4) argue for a methodological connection between phenomenology and performance through highlighting the role bodies play in the ‘operation and creation of meaning between each other’. This highlights the role of the body as a site of emergent meaning, discovered in the partial experience of other. Partially experiencing another in the process of co-creating meaning overcomes Derrida’s (1991) concern for the deferral of meaning. Rather than signifying a reproduction, or looping of meaning, the partial experience is authentically alive in the play space between bodies (Alexander, 2011: 55). Qualitative researchers seek ways to create communal research experiences for themselves and their research participants. Arts-based inquiry methodologies like storytelling, dance, visual artistic processes, and drama are but one stream of this particular approach to qualitative research (Finley, 2005). For example, Hee Pederson’s (2008) image exercise explored both the meanings individuals attach to selected images and how they negotiate meaning in a group, demonstrating how constructing research is a way to generate collaborative meaning making.

For us, eliciting each other’s express research agendas through dialogue was a beginning of a much deeper and explorative process arts-based methodology. We

moved beyond this 'reiteration of the norm or set of norms' constructed within the codes and conventions of research culture (Butler, 1993: 129). What we found through our reconnection with each other was something more fundamental, a purposive driving belief in how we see our role in acting upon the world (Freire, 1970). We found that we were performing an ongoing embodiment of inherited behaviours and beliefs in two divergent disciplines. Our 'inherited behaviour' includes a shared urge to promote social justice, to work with an acute attention to creating space through our work for those voices that are subversive, resistant and different to hetero-cultural norms. Our dialogue creates a fissure, an opening, and the roles between the friend/researcher, and researcher/researched blur, and it becomes an act of boundary crossing or constraint-defying (Jenks, 2003) research practice.

Collaborative process through shared epistemological reflection

We recognize that research is [reflexively] co-constituted, a joint product of the participants, researcher and their relationships...In short, researchers no longer question the need for reflexivity, and the question is how to do it (Finlay, 2002: 212).

The development of complex reasoning and reflective thinking in late adolescents and early adulthood (Dewey, 1933) necessitates young adults, especially those engaged in higher education, to move from tolerating ambiguity in the learning process to being

able to build arguments that require constructions of knowledge claims that are inevitably open to debate (King and Kitchener, 2004). For us authors the development of our personal knowledge alongside the metacognitive instructional approach of our university education was how we learnt skills of theatre improvisation and performance as well as the purpose and nature of theatre improvisation and performance (Barzilai and Zohar, 2014). Specifically, the theoretical framework on which we constructed and scaffolded our developing personal knowledge of theatre and performance integrated the political context and social change agendas of the thought leaders we studied.

Have the politics and social change agendas influenced our personal knowledges and approaches to research? Or perhaps the research question we seek to understand is how our reflective thinking about the elements of these political ideologies impacts our understanding of our research practice? It is no surprise that much like the theatre practitioners we studied and admire, Brecht, Boal et cetera, we use theatre practices as tools to analyse our thinking about our thinking. Rather than discursively and singularly dwelling on the theoretical constructs of our theatre training and the associated epistemological sticking points, in the first instance we use play to explore our thinking (Osmond, 2007). We transgressively transform the space of a quiet library nook or staff work office into a play space. We locate our ‘spectating’ (and ‘spect-acting’) researcher selves on the balcony as our youthful improviser selves seek to investigate together playfully (Boal, 1979; Rebecca, 2011; Erel et al., 2017).

The permissive play shifts the well-worn thinking patterns by disrupting the usual academic dialogic process. The transgressive movement we make when working together requires individual reflexivity and collaborative commitment to play. We activate our shared history and put it to work, simultaneously surfacing ideological conditioning from our theatrical/theoretical training that orders our thinking as well as restoring theatrical playfulness and practices to engage in our academic collaboration (Finley and Knowles, 1995).

We experience the work as play, as we inhabit roles, employ humor and critically engage in our approach to work which is both similar and different. We take time to partially experience each other's reality, each other's experience, and each other's sensemaking. In doing so, two worlds arise in our collaboration. Each author dedicates time to elucidate rich descriptions of their experience and thinking, inviting the other to have a partial experience through the space of interruption, questions and collaboration reflections (Erel et al., 2017). This transgressive effort travels from the present to the past; through critical reflexivity of our shared theory/practice; from individual realities to a partial experience of (each) other; to arrive at a play space that facilitates reflexive (co)action.

The game we adapt for our play situates us in an improvisational theatre arena; a 'new image theatre technique' devised by Boal (1995) called 'The Cop in the Head'. The aim of the game is to analyse the images we each bring from our experience of

conducting qualitative research methods, specifically interviews. Analysing interview scripts together through performance we play 'interviewing'. By playing our interviewing style and approach, we can examine together our habitual practices and scripts. The game plays out in the following way:

- The interviewer performs the role of the interviewer and the other person acts in the role of the interviewee
- After several minutes the interviewee role says STOP (we stop action);
- SPEAK YOUR INTERIOR MONOLOGUE (the interviewer speaks out their experience of themselves as an interviewer, paying particular attention to the micropolitics of the situation (Conti and O'Neil, 2007));
- STOP – REFLECTIVE RESPONSE (a dialogue ensues unpacking the points made by the interviewer, drawing connection points between the players).
- The play recommences the other way around – the interviewee becomes the interviewer and vice versa.

The game brings with it a metaphor of the mind as authority over the playful active body. These dynamisations (Boal, 1995) allow us to both experience in-action reflection as well as the benefit of engaging in a mirroring exercise where we play the opposite role, and see our role played back. It enables the two participants to have a

partial experience of each other. We used this game as a performance research method to facilitate critical reflective thinking about our individual research practices in preparation for fieldwork together. By opening our research practice in dialogue with each other we are able to answer a shared research question – what ideological elements from our shared training are evident in our approaches to research? Through this account of how we use an adapted ‘new theatre’ game in our shared research process, the partial performance by two qualitative ‘spect-acting’ researchers shows how we access a conceptual space between us that is co-emergent or metaxic in nature (Boal, 1995).

By consciously creating a research project that utilises a dramaturgical method to activate metaxic space it is necessary to foreground the relationship between the process of surfacing assumptions, *communitas* and the metaxic method. *Communitas* occurs when participants, (researchers or interviewees) playfully engage in structured and anti-structured interactions. These interactions create a shared experience of other facilitated by the adoption of ritualised approaches and performative interaction. The purpose in this context is to surface assumptions to foster self- awareness and awareness of difference to understand ontological and epistemological assumptions and frameworks housed by the researchers. In a merging of being and doing performative play is used to simultaneously observe and embody the other via role-shifting, and this performative act is deeply connective. Without surfacing assumptions this way, the crucial step of

sitting between two worlds – of partial experience as a metaxic act- is not given the potential to emerge as a tool for analysis.

The components of *communitas*- Frame, performativity and ritual alongside event-generated and symbolic time are the curated steps that lay the groundwork for the shared experience to occur (Spry, 2001). Accordingly, the concept of *communitas* functions as the container for the metaxic method to be guided and enacted. The next section shows that after this pre-field performative team work of surfacing assumptions, a well signed and structured performative approach to qualitative group work using our proposed metaxic method can create the space for *communitas* to emerge.

‘smalltownWoman/countryGIRL’ is a new creative work utilising a participatory approach from audience members, who also double as co-creators and contributors. Employing storytelling through a multiplatform approach, participants contribute in the following ways; via interview, Vox pop, a written story, anecdote or recipe. The contributions will be transformed into a series of podcasts, an immersive performance and a series of workshops. The subject matter explores the lifestyle, peccadillos and preferences of ‘small town women’- women who come from or live in regional areas in NSW, Australia. Using a combination of performance, and performative research methods, ‘smalltownWOMAN’ seeks to activate metaxic space by surfacing gendered and cultural assumptions concerned with identity linked to sense of place. The careful

construction of the communicative frame (Van Maanen, 2004) the organisation and framing of the perception of the experience by participants during the story-gathering processes is a key aspect. To intricately showcase country women's lives and women's voices, the act of sharing needs take to be enacted in an environment that blurs the role between listening and telling, sharing and receiving. The facilitated blurring of role opens up the potential for partial experience to occur. In a merging of being and doing the participants are guided to use performative play to simultaneously observe and embody the other, and this performative act is deeply connective. It is this shared experience that lays the groundwork for *communitas* to flourish.

Extending beyond two people that share a history and a performance language, we propose to build a community of practice with research participants to co-investigate. Using play – to partially experience one another's perspective – we hope to transform conventional research participation. Using the critical mirroring technique, through establishment of a metaxic space. Our role in this focus group investigation is to intentionally design the frame to enable the partial experience of other.

Trialling the Metaxic method with Country women

Performance helps me see ... It illuminates like good theory. It orders the world and lets the world loose (Madison, 1999: 109).

Metaxis, an invented term by Augusto Boal (1995: 43), describes ‘the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image’. In our pre-field work, the adaption and use of a theatre game and our reflective dialogue open the opportunity to inhabit each other’s ‘reality’ or worldview through emotional engagement with (each) other. Three aspects collided for this metaxic space to emerge. The framing of our dialogue as performance, the recognition of our roles as academics and friends with a shared history, and the tacit agreement to ‘play’ during our dialogue sessions. Having established this method between us as a productive way to prepare for shared research in the field, we challenged ourselves to produce partial experience of other and the emergence of *communitas* via the metaxic method in a focus group situation. In October 2018 we hosted a focus group to illicit stories about the stereotypes and challenges of being a smalltown, country woman. We invited eight diverse women from a small town in regional Australia to join us in a focus group to share stories, ideas, thoughts on their own experiences of living in a small town.

INSERT FIGURE ONE

We set the stage by hosting the focus group at the town entertainment centre. Participants entered the well known venue in the middle of town and were greeted by Author B who had conducted the recruitment of participants via personal social networks. Participants walked upstairs and were greeted by Author A whom sat at a

table decorated by a tablecloth and an old biscuit tin as signs of country women's gatherings. Participants had been asked to 'bring a plate' to share after the focus group, another sign of country women's gatherings. As Author A gestured for participants to place their plates to the side, they were then asked to 'sign up' by taking their plain language statements, project information and completing the consent forms. Once the group had all signed up Author B formally greeted everyone and performed the 'threshold crossing' narrating to the group that we were entering the 'green room' next to the toilets, that is was a very small and somewhat claustrophobic room without windows but that we would be all together. As the group crossed the threshold Author A brought in the plates and the biscuit tin as Author B led the physical warm up. Participants, having been invited to take off their shoes, now silently followed the physical stretching exercises and were asked to really look at the others in the room, taking an inventory of what they see and noticing their judgements of others as they assessed their fellow participants. Participants were then invited to ritually greet each other - one person crossing the circle to another and introducing themselves and taking their place in the circle as the next person crossed and introduced themselves.

The symbolically formal introductions made way for the participants to then have the opportunity to select one person to stand with and have a longer introductory duologue with. Four groups of two instantly began lively discussions and enjoyed a more informal getting to know you. After ten minutes Author A asked participants to

return to the circle next to their new friend and proceed to introduce each other in pairs. This ritualised enactment of the partial experience of other bonded the group as many participants remarked that they were 'meant to meet'. Now the group was sufficiently ready to begin the focus group, however in keeping with the country women gathering signs established at the beginning, a small table was laid in the middle of the circle of chairs with the biscuit tin set in the middle of it. Once the group was settled in their chairs Author A removed the recorder from the tin and turned it on, and then passed the biscuit tin which had cards with questions on them inside the tin to the participant to the right to begin.

Instructing participants to pose the question to the group, Author A assumed an observant researcher role throughout the focus group. The silent empirical observer role was broken only a few times through expressing agreement or support to participants offerings; and once to encourage one participant to move beyond a discursive roadblock she had manufactured for herself when answering the question 'What's holding you back from doing what you really want to do?':

Leanna: I think excuses, for me. Like, just there's an excuse – and I don't mean it like – that's probably the only word I can think of, but I think like you make an excuse so you don't do things, you know.

Author A: What's behind the excuse?

Leanna: I think like fear of failure, you know. I'm sort of a bit of a go-getter, you know, and I like to - I suppose if people ask me to do something, I usually like to do it, you know. I can make my mind up whether I'll do it or not. I've had to learn to say no, which is hard for me, especially with my cultural background and coming from such a big family, you know. We sort of help each other out a lot in family. But like the excuse and I was always - I used to struggle with the word no. No, I can't do that. But lately I've been - like, I suppose rethinking like how my life is going to go, you know, because my daughter, she's finished school now and I want to be like, just do something for myself, like you. I just want to visit people and do my own thing.

The impact of this question, not just at the site of the question as evidenced above, but on the rest of the focus group was felt as participants collectively delved into a dialogue about pushing back on implied responsibilities of their life/family roles.

Author B performed the role of interlocutor, instinctually improvising moments that led the group beyond positional roles they took in their storytelling of mother, grandmother, aunty, carer to greater and more open sharing. One of those examples was when the question 'What's your daggiest pastime?' and the participants responded with safe answers like dancing, listening to ABBA and eating standing up. Author B intervened:

Author B: I am a bit of a rampant nudist... We live on this property, but we do have neighbours, but they're probably from sort of - they're a bit far away, but

sometimes our neighbour – actually, he’s always on his ride-on. So I sort of have this strange, like I’m just going to see how far I can take it nudity. So I’ll hear the mower or sometimes I’ll see the other neighbour coming down and I think, “It’s not that close”. I would be horrified to be caught, but there’s something about the risk.

The naked reveal by Author B set off a flurry of laughter and sharing, and of risking together. Author B played the role of the clown or joker, seeking a response in an effort to upend the safeness evidenced in the participants answers to the ‘daggy’ question. These two moments demonstrate the different impacts these role conventions have on the direction of the focus group through performing emotional distance and closeness (Carroll and Cameron, 2005). After an hour of sharing questions, stories, laughter and vulnerabilities, the recorder was turned off and the biscuit tin closed.

The group was reunited with the plates that they had offered to share, and Author B played host to a small tea party. The spontaneity of connections that emerged as women shared numbers, recipes and arranged to meet at a local coffee house in the coming week is evidence of the emergence of *communitas* (Turner, 1988). Borrowed from anthropology and performance, *communitas* is a shared experience of ‘unstructured community where having dropped their usual societal roles, all people are equal’ (Turner, 1982: 44-48). For *communitas* to be enacted it relies on two key contextual elements: meta-reflexivity and a symbolic timeframe. Meta-reflexivity is our

collective practices of reflexivity, specifically evident when the group communally explore the issues arising through critical, yet playful dialogue, post the metaxic method (Denzin, 2003; Boal, 1995). The symbolic timeframe, by its very nature, is time-limited. We use event-generated time to suspend ordinary time and distractions, to place emphasis on the saying not just the said (Kontos and Naglie, 2016). Further, and more importantly, it is symbolic because it is a temporal space that integrates our individual sense making in a collective way. This is a shared experience of the transformative. The framework of metaxic method creates the space for *communitas* to emerge.

Discussion

We staged this research engagement. Staging our dialogue as performance frames the research as reflexive and performative; intentionally acknowledging that the ‘act of playing not only creates space, but also requires a space and time entirely of its own...’ (De Cauter and Dehaene, 2008: 95). The reflexive recognition of our roles, in the metaxic space, allowed the transition between the improvised dialogue and subsequent analysis and reconstruction of our dialogue to be interpreted even further. In a fieldwork setting, establishing a *mise-en-scene* where roles are expected and play is initiated upon greeting, enables researchers to stage the ‘research’ performance (Ackroyd and O’Toole, 2010). A well signed performative space welcomes participants into a playful engagement. Having worked reflexively to understand the knowledge building pathways of our research practice through shared investigation, we look outward to each

other and our research participants. What was an organic, tacit practice, now analysed, a knowledge genealogy and epistemic understanding of our shared methodological interests has surfaced. In the beginning, we thought that our playful approach to dialogue was about friendship; however, it progressed and transgressed as we performed our young theatre improviser selves in the audience of our mature, critical scholarly selves. We have worked to show how we surfaced the inherent assumptions that underpin our approach to research by enacting closeness and critical distance in our interplay of roles. Understanding our own bias in how we control and construct research can be explored through a shared performative process where our desires and hungers are played out in the audience of each other.

What we have found is that the process is critical and pivotal to understanding our shared desire for closeness, collaboration and experience of 'other' through the activity of research. The goal in each of our work is our attempt to engage with voices other than our own, offering our expertise as a platform to amplify often unheard narratives. We are interested in otherness because of our shared desire to transform through role; be it through performance or through our privileged role in academia (Shah, 2016). We share an interest in the play of limits, the play of roles; we share a fluidity that is open and willing to collaborate because we want to open limits. This method we narrate is one way of knowing other. By finding techniques that foster openness and connections between people we want to play the limit together as a way of finding connection, not as

a way to say 'I'm so different', but to experience difference as the intention of the method. We aim 'to trace that flashing line that causes the limit to arise' (Foucault, 1977, p. 35-36) because it opens up a community of practice to experience moments of clarification about what has been hemming us in.

The dramaturgical method provides a structured process to surface biases and differences between each other, and in us. In doing so, we perform and experience difference. This experience is a critical mirroring of our theoretical/political commitments from our shared education. It is also an opportunity, through having a partial experience of 'other', to consider the potential collective and community dimensions possible through research. Our dialogue has moved us beyond an individual critical investigation of methodology, towards a shared experience of the potential of our research practice. From an appreciative, collaborative and somewhat practice-based research practice, despite our different theoretical paradigms, we have found that we have been asking similar questions. These questions have laid a pathway towards a broader, mutual research question: Is it possible to create experiences of community through research engagement? And if so, what does it look like?

Embodiment and self-reflexivity are central concepts to metaxic space (Boal, 1993; 1995; Cohen-Cruz and Schutzman, 2006). Metaxis is at its most potent when roles are recognised and simultaneously blurred creating a liminal space where both worlds are present alongside each other and the individuals who are engaged move into

a space of reflexivity. We reflexively transgress and perform roles such as ‘spectating academics’, ‘improviser’, ‘clown’ ‘interviewer’, and ‘interviewee’. The critical role of mirroring alongside multiple role habitation was achieved by deploying a theatrical distance. Theatrical distance or role distance, as argued by Carroll and Cameron (2005), relies on ironic distancing by the performer that is simultaneously shared with the spectator(s). The distancing enables the performer to playfully signal to the audience that the performance is both real and unreal. This distancing is a subversive device that displays the conscious choice by the performer to step outside the frame of the performance and reflexively comment on the performance, signing to the audience to share and even comment back to the performer.

In our metaxic space, what is real and what is performed blurs as the embodied performance and the critical reflection interact. We are transgressing the game and the space we have created for an academic dialogue and critical reflection of our shared ontological assumptions. With the notion of transgression influenced by Foucault’s (1963, 1977) interpretation of the term playing in our minds, we find ourselves engaged in a ‘play of limits’ (1977:34). For Foucault, the individual is defined through a process of construction and deconstruction and part of this involves the separation of self from other, identified by the crossing and re-crossing of boundaries that enables limits to be identified (1963). For us, the performative method at the heart of our research raises more questions when we theoretically engage in a pursuing dialogue. This ‘play of

transgression' performs a service of highlighting the choices we make evidenced in our written performance – our use of dramaturgical language and structures that resist conventional qualitative methods; our shared interest in upholding divergent voices to the conventional literature we engage in. We seek to push the limits by examining transgression points with an aim to 'open [...] the heart of the limit' (Foucault in (Bouchard, 1977: 35).

Telling a story about oneself is not the same as giving an account of oneself

(Butler, 2005: 12)

We employ transgression to theoretically investigate the boundaries of our metaxic space, which are performatively constructed in our telling of our methodological stories. Performativity, as described by Langellier (1999), bestows on the performers opportunity to perform their identities as well as critically deconstructing how they interact with the sociological context they perform within. For us these playtimes were a space for us to perform and resurface our friendship. Using our friendship as a practice-based research approach (Mackinlay and Bartleet, 2012), we were able to more closely inhabit 'completely and simultaneously two different autonomous worlds' (Boal, 1995: 43). Together we collaboratively co-created, through performance, our storied approach to research practice: an emergent space of research. Butler speaks about the role performativity plays in asserting and reasserting norms,

even though the vehicle of performance is inherently risky. It is risky because we expose our youthful naivety as connected to our mature critical scholarly selves. Our adapted theatre game is a performance that features ‘inward’ performance of stream of consciousness (speaking your interior monologue) as well as an ‘outer’ performance to each other (reflective response) and to the audience reading this paper. The performative process of iteration we employ is the gateway through which method emerged. We construct our roles as academics and improvisers performatively; we enact our interiority and therefore we pry open for investigation our values, knowledge and motivations (Bell, 2007).

Conclusion

Research is a ceremony. It bears repeating...The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between...The research we do...is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insights into our world (Wilson, 2008: 137).

What we have demonstrated and experienced in the writing of this paper is how vital interdisciplinary research is to methodological innovation. Having unexpectedly discovered a way to derive meaning from our individual research practices, by suspending their power through a shared performative practice, we surface an emergent method. Our earnest attempt to make transparent the invisible building blocks of our

method is also problematized by our paradigm interplay (Romani et al., 2011). Sitting on two shifting and genealogically distinct paradigms, we build a (temporary) platform to stabilise our methodological investigation from our shared experience, values and knowledge.

We have attempted to create a set of criteria on which to show, in a step-by-step approach, how we conducted our shared investigation underpinned by the performative turn in ethnography (Denzin, 2003). The place from which we theorise allows us to extend concepts used in performance methodology. We have constructed a methodological design that is ripe for testing in practice and as an analytical tool for collaborative research. We note possibility of moving our research exploration forward by engaging in the temporal nature of *communitas* and its fleeting, yet potentially transformative nature. We continue to share a yearning desire to work collaboratively; to research collectively with participants. We also acknowledge that there is great concern in constructing our research heroically because of the underlying political ideologies upon which our mutual epistemic assumptions are built. Seeking to design research projects that have the potential to evoke powerful, seventh moment qualitative research (Denzin, 2003) are problematic because of their transient and dissonant nature. At the same time, the longing we feel to create experience of community, to experience difference through research, is both authentic as well as representative of deeply ethical concerns about power, the role of the researcher and the role of participants (Shah,

2016). Metaxic method seeks to aid researchers and their collaborators to create open spaces by surfacing assumptions, hungers, and desires.

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¹ German poet, playwright and theatre director 1898-1956, renowned for his productions *Mother Courage and her Children* and *The Good Person of Szechwan*, was a political theatre maker who developed further the concept of Epic Theatre through which he discursively analysed everyday life by critically calling to account the bourgeoisie, the state, the church and the military.

² Brazilian theatre director, writer and politician 1931-2009, renowned for his Theatre of the Oppressed, is father of Forum Theatre, a style of theatre whereby performers and audience work to find solutions to situations from everyday life.

³ Brazilian educator and philosopher 1921-1997, renowned for his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, is considered a leading figure in the critical pedagogy and critical education movements.

⁴ English drama teacher and academic 1926-2011, introduced the method of 'teacher in role' to the drama education sector which seeks to disrupt the power relations between teacher-student and introduction a play space of co-creation.