\*\*3.2.3 Ritual Performance: A non-traditional theatre experience\*\*

The Playback Theatre performance, like other ritual performance events, is considered a non-traditional theatre event. Significant to defining the event as nontraditional are things like the placement in nontraditional theatre venues or locations, participation of the audience members, and the emergent nature of the content. Coppieters (in Bennett, 1990) suggests that "audiences attending non-traditional theatre take more of a risk!" (p.97). There is also the likelihood that they are in search of the play experience that theatre and performance promise (Carlson, 1996, Styan, 1975). Participation of audience members in contemporary performance events is not unusual. Bennett (1990) proposes that the audience has become "a tangible active creator of the theatrical event" (p.10). She identifies the emergence of theatre for empowerment as fundamental in consolidating participation as a primary form of audience engagement. Interactive theatre processes (see Boal, 1995) demand the removal of the traditional notion of aesthetic distance. The fourth wall disintegrates into a blurred threshold for both performer and audience. O'Toole and Lepp (2000) assert that audiences have a pivotal role in what happens next. This role is guided by the way the ritualised framing of the process points to specific gaps in the action that invite genuine participation. This has emerged more lately as a trend toward the valuing of the process of performance, rather than the dominant text-based idea of theatre as the product.

Coppieters' research points to a number of ideas about audiences at non-traditional theatre events. He suggests they engage in a meta-process as they participate. In this process they are particularly aware of how the nontraditional event differs from what they expect of traditional theatre. They commonly express embarrassment and ambivalence about becoming a participant and frustration about the lack of familiar cues as to the type of performance. They feel disadvantaged by not knowing what is expected (Coppieters, in Bennett, 1990). Bennett reports that Coppieters formed four general conclusions about aspects of audience perception at nontraditional theatre events:

- One's attitude toward/perception of/relationship with the rest of the public is an important factor in one's theatrical experience.

- Perceptual processes in the theatre are, among other things, a form of social interaction.

- Inanimate objects can become personified and/or receive such strongly symbolic loading that any anxiety about their fate becomes the crux of people's emotional experience.

- Environmental theatre goes against people experiencing homogeneous group reactions (Coppieters in Bennett, 1990, p.97).

Wider reviews of audience perception research sees Bennett (1990) add a further three elements influencing audience perception: the place of the performance; the history of the Company, and audience members' socially formed cultural values and personal ideas. Similarly, the values and beliefs of the Playback Theatre performers influence their perception in a compounded way: first in the listening and interpreting of the story, next, in its embodiment in dramatic form. Bennett (1990) concludes that there is a complex connection "between the actual theatre audience and social systems [and] between the theatre go-er and contemporary culture" (p.98). The influence and relevance of the context in which theatre emerges and is performed are documented in the literature (see Bharucha, 1993, Brook, 1989, Carlson, 1996). The Playback Theatre performance is similarly embedded in and therefore could be expected to similarly reflect the broader social and cultural context.

Nontraditional theatre events often provide opportunities for audience members to engage in a productive capacity. The agency of the participant in Playback Theatre extends beyond the reception and production of the traditional performance to include the selection of the "text,"

through the volunteering of and performance of the stories that are told and enacted. This agency exists both within the individual and within the group. The decision about who tells their story and when they tell it, is as much the responsibility of the audience as it is the conductor. The process is dialectic and calls forth the agency of the conductor as ritual shaman, theatre producer and sociometrist (in the case of performances that are mediated by the values of inclusion and diversity) (Fox, 1994, Good, 1986). Participants' experiences are built moment-by-moment and are composed of the complex intersection of the various elements of the performance: words and sounds – what they say and what they hear, movement and pictures – what they do and what they see, interactions, responses, and reflections. The meaning making process of the participant drives the response. In this way, performance is a site for "public reflexivity", an avenue to processes that are inaccessible in everyday life (Turner, 1982, p.33). For Myerhoff (1990), reflexive awareness is in opposition to the "the attitude of flow" and thus a paradox of ritual processes (p.247, Turner, 1982). She writes:

Many rituals induce reflexive awareness just as they invite the fullest participation and concentration that brings about flow. Rituals' perpetual play with mirrors and masks, with borders and transitions, make self-reflection nearly inevitable, telling the individual what s/he is and is not at once (p.247).

Turner (1982) calls this a "flow-break" or an interruption to the experience of flow induced by a retrospective look at memory. He suggests that a distancing from the communal experience occurs when participants move from being to thinking or doing. However, Myerhoff (1990) proposes that participants could have a transcendent experience, which she describes as being in a state of flow while simultaneously being aware.

Reflexivity in the theatre can be a collective or communal experience. Gaylord (in Bennett, 1990) suggests that the collective experience of reflexivity and flow is induced by the ritual frame of theatre, and enables the spectator to become

> Part of an ad hoc collective consciousness, ready to find meaning and significance in the events taking place on stage. Thus, the theatrical occasion involves a double consciousness for all concerned. The performance takes place on at least two levels of 'reality' simultaneously within at least two frames. The outer frames always embrace both audience and performers. The inner frame demarcates the playing space (Gaylord in Bennett, 1990, p 148).

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The existence of two frames and of the ambiguity induced by the liminal experience is regularly discussed in theatre theory (see Artaud 1958, Grotowski 1968). In the Playback Theatre performance, this dynamic can occur twice, first as spectators (and performers) listen to the storyteller, and second when they listen/perform (performers) or listen/watch (spectators) the enactment. Sound artist, Paul Carter (1992) writes of listening:

Listening, the analysis of hearing, is not a panacea for a culture sick with seeing;

but the binaural possibility of hearing "in the round", of experiencing a perceptual reality that enlarges the subject even as it contains and confines him or her, that incorporates both meanings of nature (human and environment) without subjecting one to the other, and accurately symbolises what the eye tends to forget: that the body, and not only the ear, is a trembling flame, a vibrating surface, ruffled water. The body does not photograph the world, but filters it across permeable membranes (p.129).

Carter's words suggest that we listen beyond our ears. Yet, in the Playback Theatre performance, the words spoken by the teller command specific attention. These words and the words the conductor chooses are not merely discourse they are performance. Bharucha (1993) proposes that "[w]ords may not be the realities that they allude to and attempt to embody …[but] they have their own materiality that reflect, however arbitrarily and obliquely, the world we live in" (p.45). The very process of Playback Theatre as a series of stories that are dramatised spontaneously after each telling suggests that 'listening' to the 'words' is a central dimension of participating in the ritual. Somehow, someway, the words of the teller direct what follows in the dramatisation. Indeed, when the stories are translated to stage, the "words" of the teller become text and actors must be mindful of how much they invest the text with their own meaning. The actors' function is to animate the story as theatre. Theatre itself, "is a kind of language" (Fortier, 1997, p.6), in which visuals, action, design, symbols, words, music and sound are framed to communicate something coherent and congruent to an audience (Esslin, 1987). For the Playback Theatre audience there are at least three separate and different performance genres: the first performance involves the telling by an audience member, the second, the shaping by the conductor, and the third involves the dramatisation of the story by the actors. On all occasions, the audience is "receiving" or witnessing the narrative. Therefore, reading the narrative and the enactment demands that the symbols and text make some kind of sense to the receiver.

The dialectic imperative of theatre demands that the audience 'listen,' and that the performers 'listen', as an interactive dialogue emerges that embodies the collective world-views of the gathering. That is, embedded in both the telling and the enactment are the cultural dynamics of the community (Carlson, 1996). With this in mind, Playback Theatre could be described as a reflection or a mirror of the community and culture in which it is manifest. Unlike the intercultural theatrical experimentation ("borrowing, stealing, exchanging") of Brook, Artaud, Grotowski and Craig (Schechner, 1982, p.19), the Playback Theatre method offers an experience within one's own culture. This makes Playback Theatre both a mirror of the gathered community and a window into the social reality of the broader community. The dramatisations however, are only as accurate as the way in which the actors' knowledge, experiences and diversity matches the knowledge, experiences and diversity of the community. Bharucha (1993) suggests that this is not necessarily the only way of thinking about the actor's role and contribution. In his consideration of the outsider status of Artaud in Norway and the Orient and Brook in India, he writes that Artaud acted as a "catalyst in intimate new relationships between differing groups in the community" (p.63). Meanwhile, Brook, he claims, "captured the flavour of India", an accomplishment Bharucha believes is more valuable than merely presenting the substance of the nation: nothing is "harder in theatre than to represent the flavour of another culture" (p.70).

\*\*3.2.4 Audience Reception, Engagement and Response\*\*

Earlier in the chapter I introduced the Playback Theatre \*performance\* as the focus of the study. Drawing on the conception of performance as a process it not only includes the performer and the performative act but also "who is watching the performance, who is reporting on it, and what the social, political and cognitive implications of these other transactions are upon the process" (Carlson, 1996, p.32). Barba (1995) asserts that the "attention, the seeing, the hearing, the mind of the spectator" makes theatre art more than the actor, the space or the text (p.39). Jackson (in Bundy, 2001) describes it as a meeting on metaphoric ground between artists and audience, where the performers' skill and artistry weaves with the individual responses of the audience to realise the aesthetic experience. Just as the actors' lived experiences determine their capacity to animate the stories in a drama, so too is the audience engagement and response limited by their cultural frames. The bringing together of the cultural frame and the fictional frame in theatre means audience members experience a "doubleness" when viewing the drama (Bauman in Carlson, 1996). Carlson reports that: According to Bauman, all performance involves a consciousness of doubleness through which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of action. Normally, this comparison is made by an observer of the action – the theatre public – but the double-consciousness, not the external observation, is what is most central" to audience engagement (Carlson, 1996, p.5).

Boal (1995) uses the term metaxis to propose his idea of a double field of engagement. The state of metaxis occurs when participants belong "completely and simultaneously to two different and autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image" (p.43). In engaging in the parallel fiction/reality frames, a tension arises for audience members when the events of the real world are illuminated by the events of the fictional world (O'Toole, 1992).

Participants' responses to this deviation of the fictional from the real lead to an additional layer of engagement. Many of the new participative theatre forms evoke multiple layers of engagement. O'Toole and Lepp (2000) suggest that this is a result of the reconfiguration of the aesthetic space and where participants may become "playwright, director, dramaturg, actor or audience, sometimes several simultaneously" (p.31). It is significant when this multiple consciousness is fundamental to spectators' engagement.

Nicholson and Taylor (1998) suggest that "audiences \*interpret\* a performance." They state that it is both an individual and collective process that entails audience members "drawing on their cultural understanding of the art form and their personal experiences" (p.122). Soule (1998) states that the collective experience of audience members in this process enhances engagement. It is in this collective witnessing, Brook (1989) urges, that theatre has the potential to replace "a single point of view by a multitude of different visions" (p.11). Brook uses the analogy of the hologram to describe the potency of the collective moment suggesting that a moment of life is captured in performance when the various forces emanating from the audience and the actor converge on a given point at the same time. Bundy (2001) proposes that emotional engagement could lead to changed understanding in audiences. She draws on Dawson to argue that the emotional response exists on a continuum somewhere between "complete sympathetic identification and complete detachment. A vicarious response to the event of drama requires some form of identificatory rapport to occur" (Bundy, 2001, p.54).

Engagement with the drama in this way brings the audience member more fully into the aesthetic frame and creates the potential for new understanding. Bundy states that "if new understanding or awareness is to develop, the mental and emotional energies of the participants or spectators must be engaged" (p.57). This is not engagement for engagement sake, rather, in the manner that Bauman and Boal suggest above, to "bring to living consciousness" the new perspective for the spectator (Bundy, 2001, p.57). Participants' expectation of the experience and their preparedness to enter the fiction influences the level and nature of their engagement and determines whether they have a flow experience16.

16 Flow is discussed earlier in the section.

\*\*3.3\*\* \*\*The Ritual of Storytelling\*\*

The telling of personal story by audience participants is a central element of the Playback Theatre method. Interactive opportunities like this have been commended by narrative scholars as critical avenues through which people make meaning of their lives, and societies make meaning of their cultures (Bruner, 1986, Polkinghorne, 1988). These are identical claims to those made by theatre anthropologists Schechner (1988) and Turner (1986). Narrative scholars argue that enabling such intimate interactions to occur in a public forum paves the way for societal and personal reform through personal stories that hold within them the full social and political story of the era (see Bruner, 1986). Sayre (1989) states that narrative sharing is like ritual. He writes:

[Both] share a concern for audience, the engagement of a community. Narrative could be said to be a \*kind\* of ritual, an activity designed to unite storyteller and audience in a common cognitive, as opposed to overtly social, dilemma. Both implicitly envision transformation or change to result from our encounter with them (p.17).

Rituals are crucibles of cultural expression and a means by which to explain the specifics of the culture and the people (Schechner, 1985). Stories told in a particular community embody the cultural and social narrative of that group. In the Australian context, ritual performance and storytelling derive from the postcolonial "practice of resistance by indigenous Australians and a politics of difference demanded by non-English speaking migrants" (Johnson with Huggins & Jacobs, 2000, p.157). Embedded in the stories is the reality that colonisation was our history, and even more significant, that it is our present. This is evidenced by the seemingly stalled progress in indigenous autonomy – with ongoing "struggles for even small rights over land, resources and rights" (Johnson with Huggins & Jacobs, p.157) – and the state of affairs in the treatment of and access for refugee and asylum seekers in this country. Kalantzis (2001) urges that we must dare to tell the second story of our history, the story that is much harder to tell because "it is bound up with the problem of how to remember things that you don't want to remember". She claims that "to be true to ourselves, we must struggle to tell both stories as one" (Kalantzis, 2001, p.20). While not yet a postcolonial society, the cultivation of spaces that juxtapose stories from the centre with stories from the margins in the way that Kalantzis urges, nurtures the possibility of Australians meeting each other. Todorov (in Mantovani, 2000) writing about the Balkan wars admits that telling the harder stories contravenes how we are compelled to collectively remember. He posits that: Collective memory in general prefers to conserve two types of past situations:

those in which we were victorious heroes, and those in which we were innocent victims. … The least glorious pages of our past would be the most instructive … not when it serves to nourish resentment but when its bitter taste drives us to transform ourselves (Todorov in Mantovani 2000, p.119).

Burkett (2001) suggests that new approaches must be developed if we are to move toward experiences of community that embrace intercultural meetings. The improvised oral form of Playback Theatre provides a way.

Storytelling is a pre-modern culturally expressive technology. Poet James Cowan speaks about the state or spaces that are evoked in the storytelling traditions and the performance of culture for indigenous Australians as "the wild state". He says:

> The wild state is clearly a part of a poetic and mysterious universe. Our attempts to understand it on an aesthetic level alone are doomed to failure. My nomad friends tell me that their survival rests not on fragile food resources, but on their ability to enter the Dreaming17 whenever they wish. Yet to codify the spirit realm, to chart on a map the contours of the metaphysical land on which they live out their lives, would be to destroy the mystery that for countless millennia they have fought to preserve. Indeed, more than anything, it is the mystery they wish to protect because it signifies to them all the risks they must take in order to retain their primitiveness, their wildness in the natural domain (Cowan, 1991, pp.8-9).

>

Here Cowan eloquently articulates the intrinsic necessity of the oral, embodied performing culture for indigenous Australians. Theatrical and story-based traditions have been fundamental to claiming and expressing values, history and morality in pre-colonial indigenous communities. All indigenous cultures possess performance genres that are specific to the passage of tradition from generation to generation. Elements of these cultures are more evident in the post-colonial trend of reclamation and reconciliation in the grassroots societies in Africa, the Pacific, Asia and the Americas.

17 Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal Tribe of Minjerribah country (Stradbroke Island) reminds us that Dreamtime is the contemporary name given to "Alcheringa". She says, "Our ancient history is locked in a cultural memory, which in turn is locked in the Alcheringa, or as it has been named (incidentally without our permission), the Dreamtime" (1990, p.108).

This return to indigenous expressive forms parallels a similar search in the West, to the time when the cosmos was a place of belonging (Berman, 1981), and where men and women, as

> [M]ember[s] of this cosmos [were] not alienated observer[s] but direct participant[s] in its dramas. … [Where] his (sic) personal destiny was bound up with [the] destiny [of the cosmos], and this relationship gave meaning to his life

(p.16).

>

The post-modern and post-colonial movements have endeavoured to recover what has been lost during modernity's extended story of "progressive disenchantment. … Where everyday life [is translated into a] landscape … of mass administration and violence, [where] jobs are stupefying [and] relationships [are] vapid and transient" (Berman, 1981, p.16-17). Playback Theatre is both a post-modern and post-colonial form. Just as Brecht's work is described as a response to the political and social circumstances of the time, including the extreme events of World War 1 (where German religious and cultural institutions were seen to promote and prolong the war), the Bolshevik revolution and the German rightists' crushing of the Spartakus Revolt (Bryant-Bertail, 1991), so too is Playback Theatre seen as a response to the political and social circumstances of its time. Dauber (1999a) asserts that the union of co-founders Fox and Salas saw two contemporary movements converge. He expresses it thus:

> [O]n the one hand, the culture of political resistance, as expressed through 'pedagogy of liberation' and the connected fight against the 'cultures of silence'(Freire); on the other, the search for alternatives to the consumer society of mass-produced goods and services, for a simpler, more 'convivial' community-oriented lifestyle (Illich) (Dauber, 1999a, p.70).

>

I would extend this to include the search for meaningful connection to place (Gunew & Rizvi, 1994) and recognition (Day, 1999) when considering Playback Theatre in contemporary multi-racial, multi-cultural, multi-faith Australian society. Playback Theatre offers a culturally accessible form through which to express these needs in this era of post-colonial reclamation of what can be seen as exotic and deeply embedded indigenous forms. Ancient cultural forms have provided means through which values were expressed and celebrated, something that has been part of everyday life, and yet a source for the new, a source of forms, a source of styles, a source of techniques. Playback Theatre can be a link to this past, and renders the ordinary action, extraordinary, where simple expressions of the everyday point beyond their value in the moment, to imply some existential value. Obiechina (in Chinyowa, 2002) claims that connection to and acknowledgement of such processes brings with it abundance and a source of hope that just \*is.\*

The Playback Theatre process is story-based and draws on the necessary ritualistic and social elements required for performing culture and thus expressing hope. It facilitates a liminal zone for intercultural meetings in (white) western societies caught in the confusing transition of the dream of a diverse and accessible global world, to the realities of living it. The idea of community as an intercultural meeting is regularly addressed in arts-based practices such as community-based performance rituals and applied theatre projects (see Taylor, 2003). Giroux (1992) advocates that spaces on the "borders" such as those evoked in a ritual performance like Playback Theatre enable a new kind of resistance. That is, a space where we might encounter ourselves and The Other, outside the protocols of everyday life, and in this encounter, see ourselves and our interactions between and with The Other, in a way that is removed, and possibly reflexive. Interestingly, reflexivity can also act to hinder flow and inhibit spontaneity if it is occurring during the liminal activity (Turner, 1982, p.76). Processes such as applied theatre can be used deliberately because of their ability to "activate human consciousness in unique ways" through an aesthetic event (Taylor, 2003, p.3) and hence encourage rather than undermine opportunities for flow experiences in community gatherings.

The next section discusses community-based performance as a site for story-based performance rituals.

\*\*3.4\*\* \*\*The Emergence of Community-Based Performance Events\*\*

> Although the usual anthropological arguments could be dusted off to place the origins of community theatre, as indeed of all theatrical expression, back in pre- colonial and pre-Graeco-Roman times, its more immediate antecedents lie buried in the various forms of counter-cultural, radical, anti- and post-colonial, educational, and liberational theatre of the 1960s and 1970s (van Erven, 2001, p.1).

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As reported in Chapter Two, the Playback Theatre method evolved in the 1970s out of the same influences that precipitated other forms of community theatre that van Erven acknowledges above. Van Erven (2001) suggests that while a broad range of performance styles populate community theatre world wide, "it is united … by its emphasis on local, and or personal, stories (rather than pre-written scripts)" (p.2). If thought about in this way, Playback Theatre may be naturally defined as a community-based theatre form.

Similarly fundamental to an understanding of community-based theatre is its marginalisation as art. Kelly (1984) asserts that "the history of community arts is the history of a movement of naïve, but energetic activism" (p.97). Kalantzis & Cope (1994) report that the artistic \*place\* of community-based events are "classified as being on the margins of excellence, potentially excellent but not yet excellent" (p.16). Such placement, Hawkins (1993) argues, demands that the cultural practice, that is, the performance event, be valued (and thus, evaluated) in light of this. In fact, the peripheral position of community-based performance has become its defining element in recent decades. Van Erven (2001) posits that community-based performance privileges "the sociocultural empowerment of its community participants" (p.3). Thus, it could be claimed that community-based performance is premised on the participation of its audience. Participation such as this can empower audience members. Drawing on Boal, Elam (1996) suggests that spectators are "empowered with the will to struggle in their own lives" after an experience of participatory community theatre (p.32). Indeed, Elam (1996) asserts that the more fervent the participation, the more conscious the empowerment. To this end, Church and Tobias (1992) propose that community-based theatre workers "need an ear, an eye, and a heart – listening and watching and being aware of what's happening around us" as we develop theatre projects (p.54).

Another contemporary manifestation of community-based theatre and performance has emerged as applied theatre (Taylor, 2003). Beyond empowerment and participation, Taylor suggests that applied theatre could help communities to process issues and transform human behaviour. He states that theatre becomes "applied" when

> [T]he art form becomes a transformative agent that places the audience or participants in direct and immediate situations where they can witness, confront, and deconstruct aspects of their own and others' actions (Taylor, 2003, p.xx).

>

The purposes of applied theatre include: raising awareness, posing alternatives, healing past hurts, challenging contemporary discourses and voicing views from the silent and marginal (Taylor, 2003). Such agendas insinuate a specific intention toward change. However, van Erven (2001) proposes similar claims can be made about other community theatre genres.

Another facet of the community-based performance is the essentially social nature of the experience. In his conception of community, Cohen (in van Erven, 2001) suggests that it is the arena in which people acquire their most fundamental and most substantial experience of social life outside the confines of home. The thinking about community as a social experience and as an experience of engaging with difference is elaborated later in the chapter in the section on Community. The contemporary revival of community is part of a larger, more general tendency toward cultural struggles and conflicts over belonging. A prominent response to this ambiguity is the rise in community public events and ritual performance events like Playback Theatre. Such events facilitate the "immediacy and the intimacy of face-to-face relations" that constitute an experience of community (Cohen in Amit, 2002, p.16), while simultaneously working to bridge difference (Kelly, 1984, van Erven, 2001).

Despite the marginalised position of community-based performance and other community-based theatre and applied theatre forms internationally, Australia has an "enviable" record in terms of the prevalence and position of community-based arts generally (van Erven, 2001, p.251). There continues to be significant growth in the application of theatre in community-based processes in Australia coinciding with this greater awareness of the need for sites of public self-expression and connection (Fotheringham, 1992, Hawkins, 1993, O'Toole and Lepp, 2000). Driven by public funding, community-based arts practice has facilitated a resurgence in popular public events in response to specific social problems and the popularity of certain events like Sydney Gay & Lesbian Mardi Gras, and The Big Day Out (Hawkins, 1993, Kelly, 1984). However, Kelly (1984) cautions that the movement toward funding has resulted in a sector where "everyone is not free to participate fully" (p.44). Festivals and other public events have multiplied to such a degree that there are often two or three running concurrently, or at least serially in Brisbane alone. This social development has served to both 'teach' people how to participate in such events, and also built a hunger for variety, consistency and continuity. To this end it is not just large-scale events that thrive, but smaller, intimate (avante gard) events like the Playback Theatre performance.

Burkett (2003) argues for greater emphasis on those events that position local stories in collective processes due to their potential to enhance the experience of community. She suggests that such events enable people to "open up possibilities for disagreement, debate, contestation, anger and difference" (p.13). Drawing on Hoggett and Miller, Burkett proposes that emotions must be recognised as central rather than peripheral to any work within human communities (Burkett, 2003, p.14). Through such events, the community may once again become a place where individuals' needs for emotional or psychic connection draws them together at a local level (Lash, 1994).

Significant to the value of the community-based performance event is the way in which it accommodates the individual experience \*and\* the collective experience. Elam (1996) posits that collective reactions do not

> [D]issipate nor negate the individual experience in the theatre; rather they serve to connect the individual reaction to the wider community's experience in the theatre and to the cultural and social developments outside of the theatre (p.29-30).

>

In earlier work, Kershaw (1992) reports on an experience of audience participation in a theatre event. He found that if a whole audience responds

> [T]o the symbolism of a "possible world," then the potential of performance efficacy is multiplied by more than the audience number. To the extent that the audience is part of a community, then the networks of the community will change, however infinitesimally, in response to changes in the audience members (Kershaw in Elam, 1996, p.30).

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Legitimate participation in the community-based theatre event renders it a place where audience members can remedy the legacy of the move from active public life to disconnected and isolated selves. This assumes that the self, who Sennett (1977) argues had a "right to silence in public," and who gains and produces knowledge through observation rather than social intercourse (p.27), wants to participate. This idea of the private self in the public sphere is further explored in the next section.

\*\*3.5\*\* \*\*Community Public Performance as a Site for the Personal\*\*

Earlier, I presented Handelman's (1990) thesis that the public performance acts as a conscious attempt at meaningful connections. Contemporary community theory (see Delanty, 2003, Dempsey, 2002) is preoccupied with constructions of community that enable a reclamation of lost intimacy and personal connection in the public domain. The sustained experience of lost intimacy is one explanation for the resurgence in our efforts to find opportunities to create and experience meaningful connections. This search drives the new era of community where estrangement can be mediated through the act of reaching out (Ahmed, 2000). Community exists in between family and society and offers opportunities for connections with others (see Popple, 1995). Given this, the emergence of new studies trying to restate what constitutes community is not surprising (see Amit, 2002, Delanty, 2003, Hopper, 2003). It implies a desire to overcome the past fragmentation of society implicit in the following passage by Tocqueville:

> Each person withdrawn into himself, behaves as though he is a stranger to the destiny of all the others. His children and his good friends constitute for him the whole of the human species. As for his transactions with his fellow citizens, he may mix among them, but he sees them not; he touches them, but he feels them not; he exists only in himself and for himself alone. And if on these terms there remains in his mind a sense of family, there no longer remains a sense of society

(Tocqueville, in Sennett, 1977, front end).

>

The purpose of discussing community in the context of this thesis is to differentiate between two discrete notions of community that I wish to draw on. Firstly, the notion that community \*exists\* in some physical way, shape or form, and secondly, the notion that community is \*experienced\* as a feeling, even visceral internal state.

\*\*3.5.1 Defining Community\*\*

The literature is unanimous; \*community\* is a largely contested concept and difficult to define. Many scholars (see for example, Amit, 2002, Bell & Newby, 1971, Dempsey, 2002) claim that this is due to the heavily value-laden nature of the concept. Bell and Newby (1971) propose that it has become the term that encompasses our existential yearning for belonging and self-expression, beyond our private or intimate world. Dempsey (2002) suggests that it is a special something that satisfies our longing for belonging and gives us a sense of social solidarity.

There is an undeniable sense of nostalgia or romance associated with the idea. Mostly, it is used in such a way to suggest that it is "good for you, and its absence is bad" (Dempsey, 2002, p.140), and this, Amit (2002) claims is part of the problem. Amit and Rapport (2002) argue that community no longer convinces as a metaphor. Yet, as reported in Chapter Two, the term has been regularly used when referring to the experience of Playback Theatre for an audience.

One notion of community is that of a physical place or a \*specific\* group of people. Engagement with community from this perspective tends to mean affiliation with some specific location. Alternatively, it could mean real-time contact with an identifiable group of people through a shared interest or a shared identity. This conception of community does not presuppose that everyone knows everyone else, however, chances are people will not consider each other strangers. This notion of community is relevant to this thesis in that Playback Theatre has been performed in various locations and many of the audiences have come because of their interest in or affiliation with the context. However, it is the second notion of community, though less tangible, that is useful as a way in which to think about audience experiences of Playback Theatre. This is explored below through Turner's (1969) notion of communitas, or community as an interpersonal experience and Amit's (2002) idea of community as momentary or ephemeral. Also relevant is the idea of community as collective action

(Checkoway, 1995) and collective emotional expression (Giddens, 1990), and the possibility of community with a group of strangers (Ahmed, 2000).

\*\*3.5.2 Communitas and Ephemeral Experiences of Community\*\*

The idea of community as somewhat ephemeral and experiential is inherent in the notion of 'communitas', brought to prominence last century in the work of Victor Turner (1969, p.96).

Turner states that he prefers the Latin term "communitas" to "community" in order to differentiate between interpersonal and inter-place connections. In his study of ritual processes, Turner distinguishes between existential or spontaneous communitas, normative communitas, and ideological communitas. Spontaneous communitas is that which happens in the moment and is situated outside the domain of the dominant societal structure. Normative communitas emerges over the course of time when what was once a spontaneous experience of communitas is the subject of social control agendas, and is organised into the fabric of the social system. Ideological communitas is that which is desired, and is "a label one can apply to a variety of utopian models of societies based on existential communitas" (Turner, 1969, p 132). Of interest to this study is this existential or spontaneous communitas, that is, that experience of community which "is always completely unique, and hence socially transient … [and has] something 'magical' about it" (Turner, 1969, pp.137-139).

Turner draws on Buber when he writes that communitas is "spontaneous, immediate, concrete" (p.127). An embodied experience, communitas involves the whole person in relation to others and "arises in instant mutuality, when each person fully experiences the being of the other" (Turner, 1969, p.136). Further to the ephemeral and relational qualities embedded in Turner's notion of communitas is the idea that it embodies resistance, and occurs on the margins. He asserts that there is "no specific social form held to express communitas" (Turner, 1969, p.138). It emerges at the intervening spaces in the social structure or in the absence of social structure and "interrupts and breaks through established patterns" (Veling, 1995, p.12). Veling expands Turner's thinking to assert that the experience of communitas was more likely to:

[R]evitalise and renew our social practices and institutions than experiences of structure and institution. The sources of renewed life and vitality are not likely to be found in structure equivalent to the institutional experience but rather in the antistructural experience of communitas or the quest for it (Veling, 1995, p.12).

While the flow of communitas requires the space available on the margins, it exists only in dynamic relationship with the centre. It is this dialectical tension that prevails. Turner states that we "are released from structure into communitas only to return to structure revitalized by [our] experience of communitas" (Turner, 1969, p.129).

In his critique of examples of "fictive communality" that get presented "as the theoretical model of community," Amit (2002) asserts that "some of the most crucial forms of fellowship, of belonging" arise from incidental unstructured encounters. He states that "these forms of fellowship and belonging are intrinsically contextual and therefore often ephemeral" (Amit,

2002, p.64). Theologian, Veling (1995) articulates the ephemeral nature of community when he speaks about intentional faith communities. He claims that "community is a free blowing spirit, a vital force, ever renewing and always resistant of any effort to capture it, order it or control it" (Veling, 1995, p.12). Such could be said of articulating the individual and collective experiences at Playback Theatre performances. Wild (1981) attempts a definition that captures the ephemeral nature of community. He is against using the word 'community' when referring to "relationships of emotion developed through common experience and emphasising a sense of belonging" (p.39). Rather, he suggests the word 'communion' is better suited, differentiating the two by saying that "community is \*given\* and communion is \*experience\*" (p.40). Thus, the experience of community arises from both structured ritual experiences – communitas (Turner, 1969) – and incidental unstructured encounters (Amit, 2002). Regardless of the form it takes, the experience necessarily occurs in the public domain at a point where our private self is engaged, like that space found in community-based performance rituals like Playback Theatre.

The interactive space of communitas is dialogic. Freire (1982) claims that dialogue can not exist without critical thinking. Howard (2003) discusses her experience of facilitating dialogues within/by groups. Citing Buber, she constructs a meaning of dialogue as an exchange among human beings that accomplishes "a true turning to one another in full appreciation of the other, not as an object in a social function but as a genuine being" (p.3). It requires a setting where a group of people can maintain conscious collective mindfulness. Howard's description of the invisible energetic exchanges that occur in group-dialogue reminds one of the heightened ritual environments that Turner describes. She draws on Bohm's analogy of dialogue as superconductivity to state:

[W]hen electrons are cooled to very low temperatures they act more like a coherent whole than as separate parts. They flow around obstacles without colliding with one another, creating no resistance and very high energy (Howard, 2003, p.4).

The dialogic space of theatre positions intuition and emotional mindfulness alongside the conscious or rational mindfulness of Howard's dialogue. This enables theatre to reach beyond the limits of languages and thought in the exchange and incorporate the nonverbal, the physical body, the emotional, and the magical, in the dialogic space (Brook, 1968). Theatre is able to simultaneously privilege points of commonality or universality and enables a unique experience of liberation through the discarding of masks and the revealing of the real substance: "a totality of physical and mental reactions" (Grotowski, 1968, p.204). This idea of theatre is reinforced by narrative theorists who promote personal story as a primary form by which we make meaning of our lives (Bruner, 1986, Polkinghorne, 1988). Hardy (in

Widdershoven, 1993) claims that we exist through the telling of stories for that is how we "remember, anticipate, hope, despair, believe, doubt, plan, revise, criticise, construct, gossip, learn, hate and love" (p.3). Frank (1995) terms this "thinking in stories" (p.61). It is the content of the personal stories told during a performance that constitutes a dialogic process in Playback Theatre (Hosking & Penny, 2003, Hoesch, 1999).

\*\*3.5.3 Community and Diversity\*\*

Earlier in this section I introduce the idea that community exists at some point in between family and society. This idea of community as a space between the public self and the private self is also relevant to the thesis. Wearing (2002) claims that the convergence of the public and private is a paradox of community. She suggests that public occurs outside of the family, which she says is a private space. She draws on Goffman's metaphor of the theatre to speak about the differences between the public and private selves. Goffman (in Wearing 2002) proposes that when we are behaving as our private selves, we are "backstage." Conversely, when we are performing to an audience, that is, when we are in the public domain "using various masks and other props to enhance our performance and to persuade our audience of our credibility and value", we are "frontstage" (p.130). I propose that an experience of community can emerge from the convergence of the public and private, that is, that community is a place and space where people move in and out of their private-public selves. In this way community can be considered a space in-between that can invoke experiences of communitas.

As is discussed earlier in the chapter, performance rituals or ritualised performances offer such a space. The marginal or liminal space that can emerge when our public and private lives converge, a space in which individuals are drawn to act spontaneously, reinventing the primacy of personal agency, a space that is dialogical, reinstating the validity of the private voice in the public domain. The literature suggests (see for example, Ahmed, 2000, Amit & Rapport, 2002, Delanty, 2003) that accidental and spontaneous experiences of community outside formalised gatherings have become less likely. Ahmed (2000) reports that much of this has to do with the contemporary fear of The Other. She alerts us to the fact that preoccupation with others as dangerous impedes our social relationships and opportunities to build connections outside of formalised structures. She also interrogates the way in which the discourse of stranger danger competes with the multiculturalism discourse, the discourse she posits is the dominant community building discourse in contemporary Australia. The use of these discourses to drive social policy, therefore, sees them act against one another. Ahmed (2000) asserts that the 'stranger danger' discourse promotes a community where the stranger is expelled "as the \*origin of danger\*, whereas the multicultural discourse [operates] by welcoming the stranger as the \*origin of difference".\* By juxtaposing these two discourses Ahmed illustrates how an essentially colonial discourse like the stranger danger discourse – premised on the idea that another will invade territory and threaten person and property – serves to undermine the promotion of communities of inclusion and diversity (values promoted in the multicultural discourse).

In his analysis of spoiled identity Goffman (1968) similarly argues that The Other is constructed through the reading and rejecting of difference. He states that a reading of difference as deviant is used to justify an increase in social distance between self and the disabled body. Berman (1990) parallels the rise of mirror manufacturing in the modern era with the break down of "Self/Other unity". He suggests, "[n]ation-states, armies, self-portraits, perspectives, the collapse of magic – all these represent an increasing preoccupation with boundaries with sharp Self/Other distinctions" (p49). Simmer-Brown (inCohen, 2003) speaks of the encounter with The Other as an experience of mirroring that induces fear of this Other (p.98). Interestingly, Jakubowicz and Meekosha (2001) suggest that this idea of mirroring one another has become a central feature of theories of difference like multiculturalism and disability theory. They draw on the work of Honneth to state that:

Society is formed through constantly reinforced networks of reciprocal recognition of social presence, and thereby of the right to participate in the defining of social agendas and cultural directions (Jakubowicz & Meekosha, 2001, p.88).

Berman (1990) asserts that "we are defined by what we exclude; the Self/Other game is dialectical" and acts as a reminder (p.186). The potency of the mirror is exploited in theatre where the stage as a mirror is the dominant metaphor. The performance is seen as a

"reciprocal mirroring" where performer and audience create and affirm their identities (Soule, 1998, p.43). The performative moment enables us to witness ourselves in the living and enables insight and connection (Carlson, 1996). Brook (1989) proposes that theatre's unique gift is that it evokes "a multitude" of different perspectives (p.115).

Saunders (2003) examines the way difference influences social distance and community composition and identity through the concept of the foreign in contemporary life. She asserts that the most common meaning of the foreign is "opposition to the nation" and implicates \*home\* as an opposition to foreignness. This, she claims, enables foreign to be extrapolated to the root issue of \*not belonging\* and places it on the outside of community. This fear of difference fuels what Bellah, Madsen, Sulivan, Swindler and Tipton (1985) call the culture of separation, and contributes significantly to the widespread estrangement that permeates our lives and our community. Ahmed (2000) argues that estrangement could be the very issue that precipitates a response to the malaise of sameness. She claims that:

The process of estrangement is the condition for the emergence of a contested community, a community which 'makes a place' in the act of reaching out to the

'out-of-place-ness' of [The Other]. The work of such community formation is hence always 'outreach work' (Ahmad & Gupta, 1994: xiii). … The community is reached through reaching across different spaces, toward other bodies, who can also be recognised – and hence fail to be recognised – as out of place, as uncomfortable, or not quite comfortable, in this place (Ahmed, 2000, p.94).

Could it be that estrangement is what is common to us all? Dillon (in Ahmed, 2000) suggests so stating, "the estrangement of human beings … is integral to their condition of being here as the beings that they are" (p.93).

In \*The Fall of Public Man,\* Sennett (1977) chronicles the way in which the requirement and use of social distance between people has changed in public life from the time of the Roman empire. Once, public life was a male domain, concerned with "face", in which people could expect to be "left alone" (p.27). The public domain was a paradox of visibility and isolation. The city was a "collection of strangers" (p.48), not so much the strangers-as-outsiders idea of Ahmed (2000) rather, strangers-as-unknown. Sennett argues that on the one hand the austere face of the public domain is a product of the structures required to maintain material and emotional order. On the other hand he admits that it fosters immoral behaviour and a lewd and opportunistic closeness mistaken for collective intimacy. This closeness is a product of what Sennett calls the century of personality where self-gratification reigned (the 19th century) and is used to shore up intolerance of difference. Sennett claims that in the proceeding century we became too precious with ourselves and our need for a separate psychic life, withdrawing from the public into the "idealized refuge" of the family (p.20). Bailey (2000) too, is critical of this preoccupation suggesting the "culture of therapy" is derived from a particular kind of "privatism which now has associated organisational and institutional forms in the widely-available practices of 'personal growth', therapy, and couselling" (p.387). This trend underpins what Sennett asserts is the risk of social disintegration and increased self-absorption where we are fragile in ourselves and have trouble feeling and expressing feelings (Sennett, 1977, 1994). In Sennett's idea of society citizens appear to be devoid of autonomy, creativity and spontaneity, essential elements Burkett (2001) recommends for sustainable community.

In light of the complexities articulated above, there is a need for organised experiences of community that facilitate a move beyond estrangement. Delanty (2003) asserts that in the challenge to make community, human beings need experiences that mediate the individualism of a globalised cyber-world, foster resilience and reflexivity, and interrogate the boundaries between self and other. Merry (in Ahmed, 2000) calls for experiences that offer places/spaces where the "failed" community with weak or negative connections can meet neighbours who are otherwise "strangers to each other" (p.36). These are experiences where cultural difference is prized and celebrated, not where fear of crime and feelings of danger predominate. When premised on intercultural citizenship (Allegritti, 2001) experiences of community enables meetings between people. At these meetings we will share our memories and remind ourselves of what Marra James (in Bellah et al. 1985) promotes - that we all belong to "a community of memory" (p.159). I propose that public rituals like Playback Theatre can provide a place for this kind of experience of community, where subjectivity and voice meet the narratives of history. The Playback Theatre experience enables a reaching beyond notions of similarity and unity to propose a model of community, which fosters what Young (in Veling, 1995) calls a politics of difference and a place where we can remember together through stories (Schank in Frank, 1995). In animating our personal and cultural stories, there exists the potential for personal and shared insight and transformation. Sayre (1989) suggests that such moments are powerful and "revolve around the way in which [our stories] become present to us [and] invade our consciousness from the outside" (p.209). These are the same kind of elements

Delanty (2003) urges are constituent of contemporary community. He writes that the contemporary "resurgence of community is one of radical pluralization" (p.191). One manifestation of this multiplicity is through the emergence of personal story as constitutive of identity, and the treatment of personal story as a political and/or public narrative.

\*\*3.6\*\* \*\*Stories\*\*

\*\*3.6.1 Personal Stories and Meaning Making\*\*

Burkett (2001) suggests that an experience of community could equate to "the creation of meaning between people" (p.244). Interactive opportunities for the sharing of personal stories are commended by narrative scholars because they are critical avenues through which people make meaning of their lives, and societies make meaning of their cultures (Bruner, 1986, Frank, 1995, Polkinghorne, 1988). Bruner (1986) argues that enabling such intimate interactions to occur in a public forum, paves the way for societal and personal reform through personal stories that hold within them the full social and political story of the era.

Bruner (1986) claims that stories are imbued with the cultural, social, political and historical and provide a bridge between our sense of self and our sense of other. As discussed earlier, storytelling is imbued with ritual and acts to unite the storyteller and the audience (Sayre, 1989). This thinking about story-based forms has led to an increase in the conscious placement of personal story in public and private places in the past four or five decades. This has been influenced by feminist and other anti-oppressive sub-groups 'claiming' their stories as a way to challenge the hegemony of the privileged perspective of the white middle class heterosexual male. In addition, the act of telling our stories has been promoted as worthwhile, and even in some instances consolidating of our selves (Bruner, 1986). The place of, and the value of the act of telling our personal stories has similarly received attention and thus, the contemporary place of story-based processes has consolidated in recent decades.

The contemporary place of stories has been linked to the postmodern critique of grand narratives and the reclamation of the authority of personal experience. In response to the depersonalised, generalised, unified views of modernity, the post-modern era has facilitated a reclamation of the pre-modern place and importance of story. Frank suggests that the postmodern experience can be thought of as a time when "people's own stories are no longer secondary but have their own primary importance" (Frank, 1995, p.7), where the capacity for telling one's own story has been reclaimed. The post-colonial critique of modernity has also contributed to the recovery of personal stories from obscurity. "Post colonialism in its most generalised form is the demand to speak rather than being spoken for and to represent oneself rather than being represented, or in the worst cases, rather than being effaced entirely" (Frank, 1995, p.13). This sentiment is also inherent in the reclamation of voice and personal story through the rise of second wave feminism and in critical theory. The emergence of these different ways of seeing the world has resulted in stories, the telling of stories and story-based practices and processes again being principal to community and cultural life (Bauman, 1986).

In the critiques of narrative processes, there is a general conclusion that stories help us structure our worlds and make meaning of our lives (Bruner, 1986, Denzin 1989, Frank, 1995, Polkinghorne, 1988). Both in "listening to others and telling our own stories, we become who we are" (Frank, 1995, p.77, Day, 1999). The telling of stories is a link to memory. Schank (in Frank, 1995) explains:

[W]e need to tell someone else a story that describes our experience because the process of creating a story also \*creates\* the memory structure that will contain the gist of the story for the rest of our lives (p.61).

Frank (1995) suggests that the story is a way of redrawing maps and finding new destinations.

Stories enable us to reflect. Frank draws on Bruner when he proposes that the reflexive opportunity afforded through storytelling enables us to "turn around on the past and alter the present in its light, or alter the past in the light of the present" (in Frank, 1995, p.65).

Mienczakowski (1997) urges that an outward looking orientation is essential during this time in which there is a "preoccupation" with self (p.163). While he acknowledges that it was the postmodern theorists that have enabled us "to understand social life as a cultural plot" (p.166), he claims that this plot authorised certain voices and silenced others. Critical and feminist theorists (Lather, 1991, Razack, 1993) recommend the active application of story-based processes to seek such silenced voices. In so doing there is scope for what McLaren (in Mienczakowski, 1997) calls "\*resistance postmodernism"\* (p.167). Reinharz (1992) suggests that a critical-contextual approach is essential for such story-based processes. This enables us to face up "to other positions that might challenge and interrogate [our] own location" (Conquergood in Mienczakowski, 1997, p.167). Story-based process might assist us to invest our experiential life with moral significance and in doing so, influence human behaviour (Bauman, 1986, Bruner, 1986). Although, others (Rappaport, 1995, Stacey, 1988) warn that such processes must not undermine the agency of the storyteller, nor distort the purpose of the telling. This position places the act of listening in the centre of the story-based process. This is discussed further in the next section.

\*\*3.6.2 Stories as Experience\*\*

Much of the discussion in narrative, life history and folkloric writings about the form and content of stories revolves around the conceptualisation of \*experience\*. Shuman (1986) claims that "stories categorise experience" (p.20) and makes the following distinction in the relationship between stories, \*experiences\* and events. She writes:

Stories, experiences and events are different entities. Roughly, experience is the stream of overlapping activities that make up everyday life. Events, unlike experiences, have potentially identifiable beginnings and endings. Events are a category of experience; stories are constructions of experience. Stories frame experience as events. Stories are one of the forms that transforms experience into bounded units with beginnings and endings, and foci, and events are one kind of bounded unit. A story is a representation of an event segmented into sequentially arranged units (Shuman, 1986, p.20).

In Bruner's (1986) writing the distinction is between \*experience\*, reality and expression. He states:

A life lived is actually what happens. A life experienced consists of images, feelings, sentiments, desires, thoughts, and meanings known to the person whose life it is. … A life told, a life history, is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by an audience, and by the social context (Bruner, 1986, p.7).

Drawing on the work of Bruner, Denzin (1989) suggests that:

Persons as selves have experiences, \*experience\* referring here to the individuals meeting, confronting, passing through, and making sense of events in their lives … experiences may be problematic, routine, or ritual-like. Problematic experiences are also called \*epiphanies\*, or moments of revelation in a person's life (Denzin, 1989, p.33).

It is likely that the desire to tell a story is somehow fuelled by the original experience. Denzin distinguishes between self-stories and personal experience narratives. He states that "a self story positions the self of the teller centrally in the narrative that is given. It is literally a story of and about self in relation to an experience" (Denzin, 1989, p.43). Whereas a personal experience narrative is a story someone tells "about their personal experience" (Stahl, in

Denzin, 1989, p.43). In an effort to elucidate how these two versions of a story differ, Denzin concludes that:

Personal experience narratives are more likely to be anecdotal, everyday,

commonplace experiences, while self stories involve pivotal, often critical, life experiences. Self stories need not be coherent, linear, accounts. They need not entertain or recreate cherished values and memories of a group, while personal experience narratives do (Stahl, 1977, p.19). Self stories … are often mandated by the group, while personal experience narratives may be told only to another individual (Denzin, 1989, p.44).

Bauman (1986) adds the dimension of point of view to the discussion when he reports that regardless of how we classify the story that is told, it is necessary to make the point that the term "personal experience" implies:

(1) a particular class of reported events, and (2) a particular point of view. That is, the event recounted in these narratives is purportedly one in which the person telling the story was originally personally involved, and the point of view from which the event is recounted is that of the narrator by virtue of his or her participation in that event (Bauman, 1986, p.33-34).

This distinction is pertinent to the Playback Theatre method where the space that opens up has conditions placed upon it, e.g. the audience participant who elects to tell a story, consents to tell a story from their own point of view, and that features themselves. This positions the teller as responsible (and ethical) in their act of telling a story. Drawing on the work of Kierkegaard, Frank reminds us that "[t]he ethical person [is] editor of his life: to tell one's life is to assume responsibility for that life" (Frank, 1995, p.xii). In constructing the storytelling act as an ethical act, Frank extends the potential of telling a story to include the potentiality of any ethical act to engender communion and to engender:

A sphere where the eternal loneliness stops. The ethical man is no longer the beginning and the end of all things, his moods are no longer the measure of the significance of everything that happens in the world. Ethics forces a sense of community upon all men (Frank, 1995, p.153).

The postcolonial critique of resurgence in the telling of personal stories is seen as a way to counteract previous practices that might have contributed to silencing some voices. Feminist scholars have been particularly vocal in advocating ways in which to represent such voices without minimising the teller's authority. Reinharz (1992) concedes that this is a fraught area, with a high potential for re-colonising oppression. Yet, she recommends that we need not silence ourselves to let others be heard and in fact urges that we \*use our authority\* to help bring other voices forward. Such is the reality in the Playback Theatre method where there are various points at which performers collaborate with the teller to bring their voice forward. One example is in the interview with the conductor, where the conductor actively directs the telling albeit while attempting minimal authorial intrusion18. A second example occurs in the enactment where the actors are responsible for selecting which parts of the story to present and which to edit out (Stacey, 1988). This is the collaboration of the Playback Theatre storying process and moves the act of telling a story into the realm of performance.

Denzin (1989) asserts that all stories are derivation of the larger group, cultural, ideological, and historical context. He states that no story is "an individual production" (Denzin, 1989, p.73). The listener is also implicated. The listener is required "to unpack the relationship

18 The degree of intrusion will depend on the skill and experience of the conductor.

between the incidents described and the interpretation of what actually happened" (Shuman, 1986, p.21). In listening for the other, Frank (1995) states that there could be a mutual moment of witness. Waitzkin (in Frank, 1995) cautions that the listener is prone to interrupt when they become uncomfortable. The interruptions can work to silence the telling or turn stories away from their "truths" (Waitzen in Frank, 1995, p.63). Listening can be hard, yet is also a fundamental moral act (Frank, 1995, Razack, 1993).

Razack (1993) claims that it is the act of listening to the story that embodies the liberatory potential of storytelling. In listening, we can hear beyond dominant hegemonic discourses. She states that storytelling embodies the suppressed knowledge, the knowledge oppositional to established knowledge. The story is "the experience of the world that is not admitted into dominant knowledge paradigms" (Razack,1993, p.55). Thus, the challenge is to hear. This does not mean that any listener has a right to demand those voices to speak. While stories may break silences, they may also encourage listeners to view sociopolitical problems in individualistic terms (Reinharz, 1992).

\*\*3.6.3 Stories in the Community\*\*

The place of personal stories is progressively more prominent in community-based performance projects, boosted through community development and community cultural development projects (Burkett, 2003). Rappaport (2000) argues that this is premised on the belief that "community cannot be a community without a shared narrative" (p.6). Through the 1980s and 1990s significant effort has been invested in articulating what community means in the context of community development practice (see for example, Burkett, 2001, Ife, 1995, Kenny, 1994). Many of these efforts are directed at the need to define sites of practice. In this era of globalisation, scholars and practitioners are seeking to situate themselves in ways that are internationally relevant whilst remaining relevant at a local level. Central to community development practice is a plurality of methods guided by principles of social justice,

interpersonal connections, participation, integrity, creativity and inclusive processes that are aimed at collectively empowering ordinary people (Ife, 1995, Kenny, 1994). Story-based processes are often preferred as a way to enact these principles. Community is similarly a central term in the field of practice popularly known as community cultural development. In many ways, the creative sibling of community development, community cultural development is built on notions of social action, participation, empowerment and inclusion (Hawkes, 2003, Pye, 2003). This practice site is a primary avenue for the maintenance of cultural diversity in Australia (Theophanous, 2001). Community cultural development uses arts practice as a method for facilitating processes. Wiseman (2001) suggests that a primary aim of community cultural development practice is to foster

Cultural democracy, in which all people have a genuine opportunity to be involved in individual and creative activity through which they can express and communicate what is important to them (Wiseman, 2001, p.18).

Daveson (2001) suggests that processes should attend to collective and individual experiences and build active, inclusive and sustainable community practice. Rappaport (1995) argues that much of the work of social change and community development is in the direction of greater personal and collective empowerment. He critiques the use of personal stories as a resource in this context and raises questions about their use. He asks, Who controls these resources? Why are some stories rejected and others valued? Rappaport suggests that if narratives are resources we should be able to see who is controlling them, and who gives them social value otherwise there is a risk of social control, oppression and disenfranchisement. Rappaport claims that \*who\* tells the stories (that are positively valued) about one's self and one's community reveals how the resources are unevenly distributed and controlled by social values.

Everyone has stories, but some stories actively devalue people and other stories are not recognised as valuable at all. Some stories empower people and other stories disempower people (Rappaport, 1995, p.3).

Rappaport's treatise is highly relevant to the critique of Playback Theatre's application.

Premised on the telling of personal story, the Playback Theatre event has inherent in it the potential for all the risks Rappaport proposes. This renders the Playback Theatre performance a political space, where authorship and entitlement are contentious.

Shuman (1986) discusses authorial rights with respect to personal stories. She likens the control over the use of stories told in everyday life to the copyright authors claim over "manuscripts prepared for publication" (p.1). This position is challenged when juxtaposed with Frank's position of stories being a liberation of multiple voices. He writes:

In stories, the teller not only recovers her voice; she becomes a witness to the conditions that rob others of their voice. … When any person recovers his voice, many people begin to speak through that story (Frank, 1995, p.xii).

Shuman (1986) acknowledges that the preoccupation with "storytelling rights shifts the focus away from the stories themselves toward their use" (p.2). In Playback Theatre the focus shifts between the two with an emerging interest in the way in which stories can be used in specific developmental work in communities.

Frank (1995) proposes that working with story-based processes demands an ethics of voice, where those who have been objects of others' reports in the past, are now empowered to tell their own stories. He states that everyone has the "right to speak their own truth, in [their] own words" (p.23). This postmodern permission is inherent in the Playback Theatre method. The ethical stance is fundamental to the Playback Theatre method. Without it we are at risk of what Kelly (1984) alerts us to, causing further colonisation, further domination, further oppression.

The telling of our stories is more than a reflection of our culture. Bauman (1986) reminds us that storytelling is constitutive of social life. She claims that:

There is not much here – at least not yet– of literariness, or of performance as a special mode of communication, but there is a deep sense of context and of social action that is essential to any conception of literature as social practice (Bauman,

1986, p.113).

While the act of telling stories is in itself empowering, Boje (1991) identifies another level, a meta-level, in which the tellers self-reflexively tell stories about storytelling. The truth of stories is not simply what was experienced, but equally what is experienced in the telling of the story and in its reception (Frank, 1995). This continuation of the processes can be thought of as an additional opportunity for reflexive insight. Mienczakowski (1997) claims that this could move audience participants "towards being visible where previously they were not" (p.170).

Frank (1995) suggests that a useful way to consider how story interacts with everyday life is to imagine that we think \*with\* stories rather than be preoccupied with thinking \*about\* stories. He cites Cruickshank when he writes:

To think about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyse that content.

Thinking with stories takes the stories as already complete; there is no going beyond it. … To think with stories is to find it affecting one's own life and to find in that effect a certain truth of one's life (Frank, 1995, p.23).

Applying Frank's conception of the place of story in contemporary life liberates thinking about the Playback Theatre form from a focus on what is told, to an appreciation that there is an interaction and a dialogue through stories.

In this section I have presented the literature on personal story and the way in which it features in contemporary life as a means to make visible those who were once excluded. In this thesis, the prominence of personal story in the public domain is viewed through the ritual performance form of Playback Theatre. The next section is a comprehensive summary of the literature I have presented in this chapter.

\*\*3.7\*\* \*\*Literature Summary\*\*

This chapter has focused on providing a context for this thesis from the perspective of the literature. It presents the way in which performance theory has informed the study. The theory of public events has been included to contextualise the public nature of the Playback Theatre performances that are featured in the study. Using the theory of ritual, I have established that

![Rea%20Dennis%20-%20Public%20Performance,%20Personal%20Story%20A%20%20aa69f3095310455e95ef906fd8770c9c/image5.png](Rea%20Dennis%20-%20Public%20Performance,%20Personal%20Story%20A%20%20aa69f3095310455e95ef906fd8770c9c/image5.png)

ritual frameworks support liminal activities, and I have looked with particular emphasis, on the potential of liminal activities to induce flow and other aspects of emotional engagement. I have addressed the theory on nontraditional theatre experiences for spectators and participants as a way to speak about audience positions at the Playback Theatre performance. Storytelling as a ritual has also been discussed.

The historical emergence of community-based public events has been addressed, with this forum depicted as a possible site for experiences of community. The notion of community has been considered. The chapter argues that community can be a physical place and an actual group of people or it can be understood as an experience. Communitas and ephemeral experiences of community have been presented. Community has also been discussed in terms of diversity.

PUBLIC EVENTS

RITUAL PERFORMANCE

A non-traditional theatre experience

STORYTELLING FLOW & COMMUNITAS SPONTANEITY RITUAL

PERSONAL

STORY

COMMUNITY

Place, experience of, diversity

COMMUNITY-BASED PERFORMANCE

\*\*Figure 4: Literature Summary\*\*

Finally, I have introduced literature on personal story and have considered the act of telling a personal story as a form of meaning making. The stories of interest in this thesis are those that recount personal experiences. I have discussed the function of the listener in the storytelling exchange. In the final section I have portrayed the applications and contexts of personal story in community-based practice. I have drawn the various literatures together in a visual summary in Figure 4.

\*\*3.8\*\* \*\*Conceptual Framework & Research Questions\*\*

The final section in this chapter draws together elements of the literature in a statement of the conceptual framework that informs the study. Looking at the interactions, overlaps and gaps in the literature, I propose a rationale for undertaking the study. While the field of inquiry has been re-negotiated throughout the study, the eventual focus is presented below. I accomplish this by stating the research questions and pointing the reader forward to the methodology.

\*\*3.8.1 Conceptual Framework\*\*

The literature reviewed in the previous sections identifies significant overlap in the way performance, ritual, and storytelling are written about and applied. Performance is "live": an in-the-moment experience that is not necessarily ritualised but offers containment of a similar kind to that offered by ritual events. The ritual event insinuates that participants will cross a threshold into a liminal zone and perhaps become compelled in some way or enter a trance state. Schechner (1985) suggests that audience members \*must\* cross a threshold in performance in order for it to succeed. Perhaps Csikszentmihalyi's notion of the flow experience provides a more likely description of the way in which audience members engage in performance. The ritual and performance dimensions of Playback Theatre interact and build on one another. Performance brings with it the condition of aliveness or immediacy, surprise and risk taking.

The performance facilitates audience members' role as spectator. Ritual contributes containment, structure and some form of predictability through rhythm and repetition. Ritual facilitates the audience members' role as participant. In the performance event and in the ritual event there is a simultaneous experience of reality and suspended or altered reality for participants. The similarities and differences of performance and ritual that are articulated in the theory illuminates a multiplicity or hologram of possibilities for audience engagement in Playback Theatre, and audience members' responses to this.

In Chapter Two I recommend research that explores audience experiences of the one-off community-based Playback Theatre event to address a gap in the current Playback Theatre literature. I also identify that there is limited empirical information about the application of Playback Theatre as a one-off community-based event. As demonstrated in this chapter, performance theory supports a valid place for story-based form like Playback Theatre in the development of connections and the building of bridges across difference in communities. Thinking about individual experiences of flow and the way in which individuals respond in new situations point to various factors that may help or hinder an individual's desire or capacity to participate as a storyteller in Playback Theatre. Theory on ritual and the thinking about ritual performance add the concept of communitas as a possible way to understand collective experience of the community-based Playback Theatre event. Constructions of performance as "doing" and "re-doing" consolidate this, where there exists the possibility of embodying the tension between the form or content from the past and "the inevitable adjustments of an ever-changing present' (Carlson, 1996, p.195). This contributes to an understanding of Playback Theatre as potentially transformative for participants. A similar idea emerged from the writing about ritual with references to reflexivity and critical consciousness that are invoked through the anti-structure of the ritual event. The literature about experiences of community, or community as an experience, claim that the potential to blend elements of cultural self-examination (Carlson, 1996) or conscientisation (Freire, 1972) and promote opportunities for the personal and communal transformation (Schechner, 1985) is essential if an experience of community is to be attained. In this way, community theory provides another platform from which to think about the place of personal story in the ritual performance of Playback Theatre. Fox (1999b) suggests that Playback Theatre is a ''kind of community conversation through stories" (p.120). Engaging in this conversation perhaps equates to an experience of community for audience members. Maybe this experience of community will also express values that promote inclusion and inquiry.

The generic performance, ritual and storytelling literature, as yet, does not include significant reference to the Playback Theatre method when it discusses processes and forms. This reinforces what I have discovered with respect to the limited scholarship about Playback Theatre. It also suggests that what is available has had a limited audience. One aim of this study is to place writing about the Playback Theatre form in the domain of public performance, ritual performance and community-based storytelling.

\*\*3.8.2 A Framework for Thinking about the Playback Theatre Performance\*\*

The experience of the Playback Theatre performance occurs along the temporal continuum of the process including, but not limited to "the show", or the formalised part of the ritual performance. A participant's experience begins prior to the commencement of the show, and continues throughout the show, and after the show. Schechner (1985, p.16) describes a seven-part sequence for the ritual performance: training, workshops, rehearsals, warm-ups,

performance, cool-down, aftermath. Mock (2000) names five stages in her analysis of live performance: conception, development, presentation, reception, and reflection. In Schechner's terms, the Playback Theatre performances that are featured in the study can be understood in terms of five of the seven stages: rehearsals, warm-ups, performance, cool-down and aftermath. However, in reality, the rehearsal phase is the domain of the performers, and the audience warm-up is likely to be less formalised than what Schechner's model suggests.

Mock's terms are perhaps more useful. Applying her schema to the Playback Theatre performance enables a discussion of the dialectic relationship between the preparation, the performance and the post-performance period. The processes of conception and development occur in a dialectic manner in the lead up to the performance. Brook (1989) suggests that warm-up (preparing) "means going toward [the] idea" (p.3). This applies to both players and audience participants in the Playback Theatre performance. In terms of audience engagement, the preliminary or preparatory stage determines what audience members expect from the experience. For the performers, preparation involves physical and emotional warm-up and orientation to the context of the performance, the purpose of the performance and the target audience. The conductor has additional preparatory foci that includes "a conscious, rigorous study of any obstacle and the manner in which to avoid or surmount them" (Brook, 1989, p.7).

Mock's (2000) processes of development and presentation can be simultaneous, and provide scope to think about the performance as dialectic. This enables a consideration of the way in which the Playback Theatre performance develops through the telling of stories by audience members and the dramatisations of these stories by performers. Mock emphasises the idea that the live performance "exists as it is received", that is, that presentation and reception are similarly dialectic (p.2). It is this dialectic of engagement by audience participants that fuels the dynamic nature of the Playback Theatre performance.

\*Performances within a Performance\*

Playback Theatre can be thought about as a number of performances within the ritual framework. These include the performance proper, the performances of the teller/s and the conductor, and the performances of the theatrical enactment by the actors and the musician. The teller's performance could be in the style that Goffman (1959) and Read (1993) allude to as a presentation of self, or a performance of the everyday. Shuman (1986) also reports that storytelling is a familiar social act. In the Playback Theatre performance, the ritualised atmosphere could lead to a heightening of the teller's performance. This might see them take up a more formalised performative style as they enact their agency as a performer (Carlson, 1996) in both authoring the story text, and holding the performance focus. This can be a compelling element of the overall performance.

At the completion of the narrative telling, the performance focus shifts away from the teller. This transition can again be a compelling part of the ritual rhythm of the performance and is contingent on the skill and experience of the musician particularly. This demi-performance claims multiple dimensions. There is a moment of silence after the conductor introduces the enactment, at this point music swells and fills the stage area to effect a clear transition away from the narrator toward the evocation of scenes in dramatic form and style. The second performance within the performance is initiated. Actors take the stage and draw on the symbols of traditional theatre – the stage, actors, props, and lights – and enact the teller's narrative. In a hybridisation of art and the everyday, citizen actors improvise scenes in response to the audience member's narrative. The audience watches. They already know the end of the story. Where is the theatre in this? How is tension mediated so that the enactment is rendered art? Part of it is in the simultaneity of watching the author – the individual whom brought the story forward – watch themself. Another dimension of the theatre comes from watching the actors create their own reading of the first narrative against a backdrop of the individual audience member's first reading. A third level comes from watching the actors working to produce art. This part of the process is driven by the audience members'

commitment to learning the ritual process and coming to understand the imperfect nature of improvised performance. Finally, there is the move by audience members to suspend belief so that they may engage as spectators at the theatre.

The multiple performances emerge through collaboration between performers and audience, and are contained by the ritual frame. The delineation in Playback Theatre between spectator and performer extends beyond the traditional fourth wall to include performing or participating audience members. This enables the ordinary protocols about the privacy of personal story, the public nature of performance, and the aesthetic expectations of theatre to be seemingly breached in the liminal space. Schechner (1988) asserts that the success of the performance is contingent on a high level of participation. Masterson (2004) claims that all audience members want the performers to succeed. In the Playback Theatre performance, they want the entire show to succeed. Thus, in the 'live' moment, there is collusion by all present to believe in what is happening. While this seems a contradiction to the creation of work with artistic merit, it brings forward a new collective production. This infers, as Myerhoff (1990) suggests, that in the collective action of ritual performance there is enhanced potential for personal and community transformation for audience members.

\*\*3.8.3 Research Questions\*\*

In distilling the literature to frame the inquiry, the focus of the study has emerged. The literature assisted me to consider the roles of the audience in Playback Theatre. Similar to the domains of performance, ritual and storytelling, Playback Theatre offers a simultaneous experience of spectating and participating. The way in which Playback Theatre draws on personal stories and theatrical form within a ritual performance process could be said to expand the potential for engagement in the public event and encourage individual and group agency and responsibility. A hybridised performance form, Playback Theatre combines solo telling performances by spontaneous, self-elected (often-untrained) audience members with improvised theatrical enactments performed by citizen actors19. As stated earlier, the experiences of audience members are the focus of this study. Emerging from the review of the Playback Theatre literature in Chapter Two, I have identified a number of claims that influence the direction of this study. These claims are that Playback Theatre:

19 A citizen actor has training in the forms and philosophy of Playback Theatre, but may have no formal theatre training. They do not derive their income from Playback Theatre and undertake their Playback Theatre practice in the spirit of service. Fox (1994) suggests that Playback Theatre is avocational.

- provides an experience of community;

- is generally a 'good' experience for audience members; and

- is empowering for storytellers.

In considering these claims in light of the development of Playback Theatre theory I have found limited documentation of the experiences and perceptions of audience members.

Similarly, I have found that the one-off Playback Theatre public event featured little in comparison to theory derived from an extended exposure to the Playback Theatre method through a workshop situation, for example. Thus this study sets out to seek audience members' experiences of the one-off public performance event. Situating the study within the domain of my local Playback Theatre Company precipitates an additional defining aspect of the performance genre examined. This is due to the context-specific work of the Brisbane Playback Theatre Company during the research period. Thus, the research focuses on the application of Playback Theatre as a \*one-off community-based public event\* and is guided by questions that have emerged as the study progressed.

Clarification of the research questions guiding the study has been a dialectical process informed by my experience in data collection and analysis. The question at the centre of this study is:

- What are audience members' experiences of the one-off community-based Playback Theatre performance?

The one-off context based Playback Theatre performance is described in Chapter Two with more detail provided in Appendix 2. The study explores audience members' experiences across a range of different contexts. The exploration is framed by the following sub-questions:

- In what ways do the audience members engage and respond during and after the one-off community-based event?

- In what ways does the Playback Theatre form induce these experiences?

- In what ways is Playback Theatre an experience of community for audience members within the specific context?

This study focus aligns somewhat with the ritual and social dimensions that Dauber's (1999b) framework proposes. However, rather than asking what does it achieve in the ritual dimension, I focus on audience experience of Playback Theatre. His question for the social dimension: \*What effect does Playback Theatre have on the audience, the performing Company and on the social context in which it is embedded?\* is perhaps wider than the scope of this study, which excludes the experiences of performers. The research aims to frame the practice of Playback Theatre beyond the often self-referential frames that are a feature of the Playback Theatre writing. It adds the voices and perceptions of audience members to the Playback Theatre scholarship, specifically with relation to the one-off context based performance. As an inquiry into audience experience the research process seeks to articulate ways in which people participate in the Playback Theatre ritual, the impact of telling, listening and watching the stories as they unfold. Finally, it determines how the experience of the repetitive embodiment of an ethics of listening beyond words, and of the values of mutual respect, co-operative creativity, acceptance of difference, promotion of personal truth, interest in the other and awe in our human imperfection contributes to an experience of community for participants.