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Taming the political; the struggle over recognition in the politics of applied theatre

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Taming the political; the struggle over recognition in the politics of applied theatre

Abstract:

The emerging sub-field of Applied Theatre encompasses a wide range of pro-social 'alternative' theatre practices, but it also refers to a discursive practice that seeks to reconcile the apparently contradictory claims of the politics of egalitarian redistribution and the politics of difference. The argument in this paper is that this emerging political position reflects a contemporary turn towards the identity politics of recognition and away from political theatre's traditional concern with the 'old left' politics of redistribution. A critique of the discourse of Applied Theatre, based in the political philosophy of Nancy Fraser and James Tully, leads to a consideration of the potential of a new left politics of recognition and dialogue in which the processes of participation in social and artistic struggle are seen as the practice of civic dialogic freedom.

Keywords:

Applied theatre, politics of recognition and redistribution, dialogic freedom, theatrical process and participation in the public sphere.

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Pro-social characteristics of the sub-field of applied theatre

In the first pages of his biography of Meyerhold, Ted Braun (1998) juxtaposes two views of the social function of theatre as they were expressed by Stanislavski, on the occasion of the first rehearsal of the Moscow Art Theatre in 1898 and by Meyerhold in frustration at Stanislavski's direction of *Hedda Gabler* nine months later.

What we are undertaking is not a simple private affair but a social task. Never forget that we are striving to brighten the dark existence of the poor classes, to afford them minutes of happiness, and aesthetic uplift, to relieve the murk that envelops them. Our aim is to create the first intelligent, moral, popular theatre... (p. 9)

Are we as actors required merely to act? Surely we should be thinking as well. We need to know why we are acting, what we are acting and whom we are instructing or attacking through our performance. And to do that we need to know the psychological and social significance of the play, to establish whether a given character is positive or negative, to understand which society or section of society the author is for or against. (ibid.)

These views are iconic of a traditional distinction between pro-social theatres that seek to ameliorate the psychological harm caused by social and economic injustices and political theatres seeking to directly challenge the causes and class interests, which underpin these same injustices. A distinction between what Brecht would call a theatre of 'mere entertainment' and a 'political theatre' in the Modernist sense of a theatre of social change. My contention in this paper is that this analytical distinction between the therapeutic and radical functions of theatre is particularly appropriate to the discussions that characterise the emerging field of Applied Theatre (Ackroyd 2000, Taylor 2003 Thompson 2003, Nicholson 2005a). I am particularly drawn to Nicholson's idea that the term Applied Theatre (AT) refers to a particular tradition of 'discursive practice – as a way of conceptualising and interpreting theatrical and cultural practices that are motivated by the desire to make a difference to the lives of others' (2005a, p.16). The purpose in this paper is to illuminate a critique of the emergent politics of AT with reference to contemporary and relevant discourse in the field of political theory with a particular emphasis on the contest between the politics of recognition and redistribution (Fraser 1995, Fraser and Honneth 2003, Taylor 1995, Tully 2000).

There are different positions within this 'new' sub-field of western theatre and performance, but there is consensus around key features of its practices, functions and political associations. Applied Theatre tends towards the efficacy pole in Schechner's (1988) performance dyad of efficacy-entertainment. It often claims to be transformative at a personal level at least if not always in terms of larger scale social change (Ackroyd 2000). Its proponents stress that AT practitioners strive towards 'cultural engagement, social intervention and educational change' (Nicholson 2005b, p. 119). Its antecedents are in the legacies of the 19th and 20th century Euro-American avant-garde movements in particular. This history encompasses those theatre ensembles and practitioners, who have seen, to use Darko Suvin's phrase, theatre as a dynamo for social change through transformative political action rather than as a mere 'mirror unto nature' that reflects, naturalises and

neutralises the status quo (Surkan 1967, Bourdieu 1993, Berghaus 2006). In the tradition of the avant garde the emergent identity of AT distances itself from commercial and popular forms of theatre-as-entertainment and associates itself with other marginalised pro-social and efficacious theatre movements such as Drama and Theatre in Education (DiE/TiE), Theatre for Development and particularly the Theatre of the Oppressed and the work of Augusto Boal.

AT eschews mainstream theatre audiences and gives allegiance to working with 'marginalised groups' and those at 'vulnerable points in their lives' (Nicholson 2005b p. 119). AT embraces a wide range of theatre events that are staged 'beyond theatre' (Thompson 2003) in a diverse range of settings from classrooms to prisons, community halls to rural gathering places, youth clubs to refugee camps. This panoply might also include corporate settings, which reflect the wide range of pro-market uses of drama and theatre which could by any other definition be included under the largesse of the applied theatre umbra but in this paper I am concerned with those forms of applied theatre which are determinedly pro-social and which make some political claim to be resistant to the values of new capitalism (Kershaw 1999, Thompson 2003, Nicholson 2005a).

The pro-social emphasis is reinforced by consensus around the importance of 'active participation' between producers and audiences, more usually described in the discourse as participants, 'spect-actors' or clients. The pro-social and socially transformative value of participation is associated with the idea of process and rehearsal so that AT projects emphasise negotiation and dialogue between practitioners and participants in the planning, devising, execution, and aftermath of performance (Boal 2006). Many of its techniques are borrowed from the rehearsal rooms of various avant garde movements as well as more conventional psychological exercises based on Stanislavski and the psychodrama repertoire developed by Moreno.

The emphases on process and participation often focus on the formation of a dialogic social contract between practitioners and participants, which is both freely entered into and free to participants in terms of the resources needed to access AT. This social contract is distinctive from the economic agreement between producers and paying audiences that characterises those forms of commercial and subsidised building based forms of theatre that AT distances itself from.

Not surprisingly, the discourse of AT is pre-occupied with how this alternative and pivotal social agreement is made. Helen Nicholson in particular argues that the ethicality of this negotiated settlement, or the 'ethics of intervention' in her terms, are central to the political claims of the AT project (2005b p. 122). I argue that the 'ethics of intervention' as they are currently conceptualised and interpreted in the discourse are essentially Hegelian and tend towards forms of theatrical and social intervention which aim to establish an 'ideal reciprocal relationship' (Tully 1999, Fraser 1995, Habermas 1995) between practitioners and participants through negotiation of representation and working towards equitable norms of mutual recognition.

Is there space for politics in the new politics of place?

In Hegel's thesis, the formation of personal and social identity is an inter-subjective and dialogical process. One recognises oneself only by virtue of recognising, and being recognised by, another subject. The recognition of others is essential to the development of self-identity. In an 'ideal reciprocal relationship' subjects recognise each other as being equal and separate. In this sense the Hegelian inter-subjective model of identity formation can

appear to bridge the claims of the politics of equality with the politics of difference. This inter-subjective theory of identity formation resonates with the idea of 'ensemble' and the processes of 'characterisation', alterity and the social and artistic experimentation with 'identities' in the highly contextualised and processual forms of theatre making associated with AT practice.

It follows that AT's position taking valorises the local and the specific (communitarian) and is suspicious of the universal and monologic. In one of the earliest formulations of AT, Judith Ackroyd (2000) established that an essential characteristic is its tailoring to specific audiences, contexts and purposes. This emphasis on theatre making for a particular purpose, with a specific audience in a unique context has subsequently been elaborated into a political theory by a number of contributors to the discourse of AT. In her editorial for RIDE 10:2 which was themed around discussions of 'ethics' and 'ethicality', Nicholson comments that one of the recurrent concerns is 'with contextuality and with the politics of space' (2005b p. 120). Elsewhere, she argues that AT is 'intimately tied to politics of context, place and space' and that 'working in drama brings into focus questions of allegiance, identity and belonging' (2005a p. 13). In her contribution to RIDE 10:2, Amanda Stuart Fisher asserts: 'we must seek to identify truths that are relative to each of the different contexts we encounter' (2005 p. 248). James Thompson in similar vein sets out an agenda for AT which embraces the idea that 'values are historically specific, partial and relative to the conventions of a particular cultural context' (2003, p.26).

Nicholson expresses a hesitation about the universal claims of democratic politics which is commonly found in the discourse of AT in what she describes as the "irresolvable tension – **between** an overarching ideal of a radical, just and inclusive democracy for all and a respect for local circumstances" (2005 p.13). This 'tension' can suggest that the egalitarian terms of active and participatory democratic engagement might be suspended in local situations where the prevailing norms of mutual recognition in a group or community work against the ideas of equality, fairness and justice underpinning the social contract implied by 'ideal reciprocal relationship'. It suggests that democracy is only of relative value in places where 'historically specific' inequities of access to resources, hierarchical status orders and misrecognition of women, ethnic minorities and other forms of injustice have become 'normalised' as the 'conventions of a particular context'.

The tension described here is between the political imaginary of democracy and the politics of places which are not democratic. It imagines the existence of places which are democratic and which are in tension with places that are not. It nominalises and spatialises democracy rather than seeing it as a processual and active struggle towards 'parity of participation'. In the Modernist political theatre tradition, the role of the theatre artist is to create democratic spaces through the social artistry of theatre. This social and artistic space is characterised by its democratic processes and working practices; by the insistence on working towards 'parity of participation' in the democratic space of theatre regardless of place. This space can be created and exist even in places which are not democratic, as the history of censorship demonstrates. In places where different forms of inequity have become institutionalised, it is even more necessary for socially committed AT work to create democratic spaces which allow participants to experience and model the processes and circumstances of egalitarian democracy.

There is also a danger that the communitarian liberal perspective (Sandel 1982, Gray 1996, Taylor 1995) that flows through the discourses of AT, can dramatically simplify and reify local group identities. Thompson, for instance, suggests that AT work should give primacy to 'a community's constructed accounts of itself' (2003, p.26), ironically this commonly held view

negates the original Hegelian premise in which identities are formed through dialogical interactions with others including the AT practitioner. It makes cultural identity monologic rather than dialogic, an 'auto-generated auto-description' (Fraser 2003a p. 26). To accept the internal image is to put it beyond critique from and by others whose own image or right to recognition may be affected. You cannot say that there can be no legitimate external challenge or right of recourse in the wider society. A community's constructed, or self-authorized, image of itself may also, of course, mask a myriad of other struggles within the community for greater recognition and access to resources. It may marginalise and deprioritise the multiple other collective identities included within the community; the 'cross-cutting axes of difference' as Fraser calls them (2003b, p.122).

Tully (2004) argues that 'struggles for recognition are relational and mutual rather than independent and multiple rather than dyadic' (p. 86). Struggles over norms of recognition are multiple and interwoven, and impact on other struggles within a public sphere which has an increasingly global reach. They are, as Laclau and Mouffe (2001) argue, struggles **over** recognition that affect all parties who share in a system of governance. Following Foucault (1998). Tully describes a 'norm' of recognition as a relation of meaning and power that constitutes the behaviour and expectations of the partners' sharing or co-operating in a system of rule bound behaviours such as those that operate both at a societal level but also in classrooms, prisons, families and group identities.

In Tully's construction a 'norm of mutual recognition' includes the characteristic discursive forms of self-awareness or self-consciousness and non-discursive forms of conduct in the co-operative system. In other words it legitimises the position taking strategies and inter-subjective behaviours of subjects sharing in a cooperative system; how they see themselves in relation to others. But Tully adds another dimension to the norm, which is a subject's or group's access to or exclusion from 'resources and power through rights, duties and entitlements attached to the identity under which they are recognised' (2004, p. 85). In this formulation issues of identity and recognition are placed within the struggle for redistribution of resources and power. It combines knowledge of, in Meyerhold's phrase, the 'psychological and social significance' of recognition.

AT practitioners often cast themselves as 'outsiders', or 'visitors' to use James Thompson's phrase, who can appear in the discourse to be more concerned with erasing their morally relative and authoritative influence on some of the groups that they work with. They see their outsider status as an ethnographic problem of interpretation rather than as a political problem of action. We are all, in Tully's analysis, affected and implicated by even the most local of instances of cultural misrecognition and economic injustice. We are touched by and therefore have an entitlement to a voice in the struggles of other subjects and groups who are claiming an equal place in the world based not just on recognition but also on the egalitarian distribution of resources. The AT practitioner rightfully and unavoidably enters into a social dialogue with a group's 'constructed account of itself' and through this process both the 'visitor' and the group begin to shift and develop their inter-subjective understandings. The work is not just about recognition of a group's identity and challenges to the norms by which they are recognised by others but also about issues of power within the group and between the group and other collective identities and who has ownership over the means and processes of social and artistic representation.

In recent times, identity politics and mainstream theatre have boiled over in the UK and become part of what James Tully calls a 'multilogue' between a wide range of identity positions in society. When the Belfast playwright Gary Mitchell was firebombed into exile by loyalist paramilitaries in November 2005, this was not simply a struggle between a playwright

and a paramilitary. The fact that this incident can happen affects all subjects in the system of governance. It is not just a sectarian struggle that can be restricted to the local 'questions of allegiance, identity and belonging' and 'politics of place' in North Belfast, nor can it be resolved by those most immediately effected, without recourse to deliberative and agonistic democratic institutions; real politics. When angry Sikh men violently protested against the first night of Gurpreet Kaur Bhatti's *Behzti* and closed the run at the Birmingham Rep in December 2004, the struggle was not simply between different subjects sharing Sikh identity. It was also a struggle over freedom of speech and the place of theatre in a democratic society that should affect and involve all of us. Both these artists challenged the norms of mutual recognition within their local communities, but not belonging to the Sikh community or the Orange order does not exclude us from their struggles over recognition; we are all affected and share the right to freely participate in any struggle that involves us at whatever distance. There is no outside.

The cops at the door become the cops in the head

There are some interesting analogies between descriptions of the artistic and social processes of AT and identity politics. Fraser (2003b) argues that this form of political theory is based on the premise that to belong to a group that is devalued by the dominant culture of one's society is to be misrecognised. Following Hegel, identity politics claim that misrecognition damages self and collective identity. A lack of respect leads to a collective distortion of self amongst members of the disesteemed group. Negative self images become internalised and prevent the formation of a healthy and positive cultural identity. Fraser describes the form of cultural engagement and affirmative action associated with identity politics in these terms:

Such a politics aims to repair internal self-dislocation....it requires that members of misrecognised groups reject such pictures in favour of new self-representations of their own making. Jettisoning internalised negative self-identities, they must join collectively to produce a self-affirming culture of their own. Having refashioned their collective identity...they must display it publicly in order to gain the respect and esteem of society at large. The result, when successful, is "recognition", an undistorted relation to oneself. (p. 23/24)

This processual and collective movement from internalised images of oppression to images of emancipation and the creation of collective strength and identity leading to a performance celebrated by public recognition and approval sounds remarkably like the plan for a Boalian workshop in any number of places and spaces. Fraser argues that the identity model, which corresponds closely to Boal's 'theatrical and therapeutic model' of the *Rainbow of Desires* (Boal 1995), can contain some genuine insights into the psychological effects of racism, sexism and colonisation. But, the psychological approach to identity and misrecognition displaces the challenge to the social injustices and economic inequalities that are integral to misrecognition, so that misrecognition becomes a free standing cultural harm uncoupled from the social-structural underpinnings of misrecognition. For instance, a challenge to negative images of what is considered 'feminine' in the dominant norms of a society, cannot be isolated from the institutionalisation of these negative images in low pay and other economic and legislative disadvantages for women. Merely, substituting an affirming set of positive and 'empowering' images of 'emancipated womanhood' and cultural pride, will not address the underpinning social and economic structures that deny women their equal share in economic and cultural resources.

The psychological and therapeutic qualities of identity politics have had a profound effect on Augusto Boal, the iconic and definitive practitioner of the sub-field of AT. Since the late eighties, his work has become increasingly fixed in the idea that cultural misrecognition and the distortion of self that come from dominant and internalised negative images of self/selves must be addressed prior to the struggle for the redistribution of resources (Boal 1995).

So, when you true artists talk of the blood that must be spilt, this blood you sing about spilling – its our blood you mean, not yours, isn't that so? (Boal 1995, p. 3)

With these words the peasant Virgilio, challenged Boal. In this iconic story, Boal claims that he learnt to 'see a human being rather than simply a social class, the peasant rather than the peasantry' (p.7). Virgilio taught Boal that the symbolic struggles of representation associated with the identity politics of recognition get you into less trouble than the active and political struggle for the redistribution of resources, which Virgilio was preparing for. Boal was forced to recognise the limits of theatrical intervention in struggles over recognition and equality. To recognise that his 'guns were theatrical props, they were not real weapons' (ibid.). The cops at the door, became the cops in the head.

Bewilderment and beyond – recognition or redistribution in the political theory of applied theatre?

Thompson (2003) uses the phrase 'bewilderment and beyond' to describe his own struggle as a socially committed practitioner to find an efficacious political position to fill the gap left by the collapse of those agonistic class based politics which had fed the political theatres of the post war period of 'social democracy'. Kershaw (1999) argues that a new 'promiscuity of the political' has filled the vacuum in which the 'the political has found its way into almost every nook and cranny of culture' (p.16). Kershaw suggests that this destabilisation of class politics is a result of the 'anti-foundationalist theorists of post-modernism and its cousins' and increasingly the politics of AT appear to be aligning themselves less with the socialism and the politics of redistribution associated with their ancestors in political theatre and more with the ambivalences of 'identity politics' and philosophical communitarianism.

For Fraser the 'irresolvable tension' between new forms of identity politics based in the claims for cultural recognition of group rather than class identities and the claims of egalitarian redistribution has become the central dilemma of justice in a 'post-socialist age' (1995). In Fraser's analysis we have group identity rather than class interest; cultural domination has replaced exploitation as core injustice and cultural recognition has replaced egalitarian redistribution as the remedy and goal of political struggle:

Demands for cultural change intermingle with demands for economic change, both within and among social movements. Increasingly however, identity-based claims tend to predominate, as prospects for redistribution appear to recede. The result is a complex political field with little programmatic coherence (p.70)

Bewilderment and beyond. Of course claims for recognition must be dialectically connected to struggles for redistribution and what is needed is a political theory for AT that both recognises and cross-references economic injustices with cultural and symbolic injustices. The problem is that by uncoupling the one from the other, social justice questions about the inequitable distribution of resources at every level become displaced in AT by affirmative action, which is designed to 'heal' the psychological rather than socio economic causes of inequality. The socio-economic injustices associated with poverty, for instance, are replaced

with the idea of a 'poverty of aspiration', which UK Minister of State Tessa Jowell claims is the psychological root of dependence on welfare systems (2004).

Applied Theatre and the therapeutic state; brightening the existence of the poor classes

New Labour's governance in the UK is an example of the institutionalisation of the politics of recognition. Increasingly, cultural policy and funding mechanisms in the UK have taken on an agenda of social regeneration, social inclusion and participation and rehabilitation, which traditionally has been the focus of social and economic policy and other redistributive strategies. And of course this apparently 'social' and 'inclusive' turn in cultural policy has benefited applied theatre practitioners and their projects as well as coercing major cultural producers to engage in various forms of 'outreach' projects with disadvantaged groups. This is cultural policy based in the pro-social and affirmative rather than political and transformative vision of New Labour. Chris Smith (1999), one of the architects of social market cultural policy describes it as:

Involvement in art can give someone however marginalised they may be from society, a sense of self-worth, a self-confidence, something to live for and to feel good about. Of course in the battle for social regeneration bricks and mortar and safe roofs and good schools and the chance of a job are vital. But the starting point for all of this has to be a sense that you can achieve something as an individual, that there is something to aspire to in life, that you are worth something as human being. Involvement in the arts can give you just that (p. 15)

Munira Mirza (2005) sees this 'therapeutic ethos' in UK cultural policy as reflecting a 'tendency in contemporary culture to view social relationships in primarily emotional or psychological terms' (p. 264). She is not alone in arguing that current cultural policy in England is designed to affirm, include, recognise and self-actualise 'disadvantaged' groups in particular. But this otherwise enlightened social/cultural policy is not mirrored in economic policies which redistribute resources in favour of these same groups. Mirza dubs England as the 'therapeutic state' and rightly suggests that through selective funding of culture-as-social-policy the 'attempts to change the individual's emotional life reflects a limited framework of expectations regarding social change'.

Mirza's critique has a particular relevance to the politics of AT work. We have already noted that, in part, the growth of AT in the UK has been supported by a certain congruence with the aims of New Labour's socially tuned, but essentially therapeutic, cultural policy and funding. The government have been keen to support work in the contexts where AT thrives – 'in prisons, forgotten estates, hospitals, museums, centres for the disabled, old people's homes and under-served rural villages' (Thompson 2003 p.15). In other words one effect of the pro-social and affirmative cultural politics of New Labour has been to create a secondary labour market for theatre practitioners and other artists who seek work 'beyond theatre' and with those who are vulnerable and marginalised. However, as Boal notes, there is always a 'Maecenas' - a funder or funding agency whose values and political objectives may not be as ethical or socially critical as those of the front line AT practitioner (2006, p. 69).

It is quite legitimate for theatre to be both therapeutic and politically challenging. It is necessary, sometimes, for it to be healing and affirmative as well as socially transformative. From an anthropological perspective Schechner (2000) suggests that there are four interlocked domains of performance – education, healing, ritual and entertainment – and at different times, with different audiences, for different purposes theatre becomes a human

need and entitlement. The political problem is when the therapeutic and affirmative uses of theatre become confused with the socially transformative.

When theatres of healing and entertainment masquerade as political spaces for radical social transformation or claim to lead to 'empowerment' or to 'make a difference to the lives of others' the effect can be to further normalise historical patterns of inequality and disadvantage. Obscuring the distinctions between Stanislavski's pro-social and Meyerhold's political theatres will encourage new cultural forms of 'false consciousness' rather than a contemporary form of Frierean *conscientização* which would include an explicit and dialogic awareness of the ethics of state sponsored work. Nicholson (2005) rightly suggests the need for a rigorous critical reflexivity in order to ensure that in claiming to be making radical social interventions into the lives of 'vulnerable' others we are not merely accommodating the displaced politics of the social market paradigm of governance.

The new politics of recognition and dialogue – are we as actors required merely to act?

Contributors to the RIDE special issue on impact assessment demonstrate that part of the problem in the UK has been the expectation that AT projects should have measurable 'outcomes' (RIDE 2006). That a limited process of theatrical engagement, can make a measurable difference to the lives of others. This idea that theatre can be socially transformative in terms of real and dramatic change in people's lives is reinforced by project funding requirements, which often require some evaluation of the 'impact' of the project. This may be particularly true where AT is part of vulnerable funding arrangements or marginalised in an institution as it often is in different education systems and institutions. Projects and interventions by AT are usually limited by time and resources to 'minutes of happiness' and there may be an expectation of getting a result, even though the lives of many participants will continue uninterrupted. Part of the problem may also be in the normative aesthetics of Western drama in which there is often a closed dramatic structure, or *dénouement*, which presupposes some 'result' or 'end point' in the work – that the problem that is given theatrical treatment will be aesthetically and therapeutically resolved at the end of the show.

James Tully argues that this closed structure is based in a 'finality presumption' (2004 p.95), in the idea, that the importance of struggle is the eventual reconciliation of conflict or overcoming of misrecognition. Many of the subjects that AT practitioners work with live a life of struggle and struggles – there is no monolithic end in sight. It is also the case that in any altercation or challenge to the normal(ised) ways of doing things there will be dissenters and those who have an entitlement to 'reasonable disagreement' with resolutions. In this sense, struggles don't have products beyond what is learnt from the process of struggle itself. Struggles change us and our conceptual frameworks because we are changed by the politics of struggle itself. As Homi Bhabha (1994) reminds us in illustrating his related concept of 'third space', the women in mining communities during the bitter strikes of the eighties were politically transformed by their engagement in the struggle. For these women the process of becoming through struggle was more important than the lack of a 'conclusion' or outcome to the struggle. They did not 'lose' the strike, they were changed by it and the political lessons learnt from their engagement in it.

In Tully's view, the real political significance is in the struggling itself, and in ensuring that all subjects –as agents in Foucault's sense – have a common right to engage in struggles that challenge the cultural and economic norms of mutual recognition when they consider these

norms to be unfair or unjust. This freedom to struggle allows citizens to uncover the naturalising influence of prevailing norms of recognition, and to treat norms as being normative in Foucault's sense of being changeable through human agency (Foucault 1988).

A concern for uncovering the internalised 'situational truth' is replaced, here, by a concern to identify and publicly challenge the asymmetries in power, knowledge, influence and argumentative skills which block 'marginalised' subjects and groups from having an effective say. This moves the politics of recognition, which characterise the discourse of AT, away from the psychologism and culturalism of a political theory based on the re-cognition and re-imagining of free-standing cultural identities, and towards a focus on creating and maintaining 'parity of participation' (Fraser 1995, p.19) in the public sphere, (Arendt 1958, 1990). Both of which are necessary to a system of democratic governance, be that a school, youth theatre, community group or larger society.

Arendt's idea of a formally constituted public sphere – a space and time for politics - in which social actors are free to engage in a continuous process of dialogue and challenge to the norms of mutual recognition and distribution of resources and which is brought into existence through the formal participation of subjects is also a description of the process of bringing theatre into the lived experience of participants. Both are artificially constructed and formalised public spaces for the deliberation of the common good and the exchange of reasons by actors.

This is a modest conclusion. The critique in this paper has been of the discursive practice of AT which has tended, in its position taking, to wed its politics of place with the politics of identity and recognition and distance itself from the universal claims of equality and egalitarian redistribution. But the social and artistic practices of AT with the commitment to full participation in the processes of theatre making, offer a second order experience of what it is like to participate fully and equally in the processes of democratic freedom. Through the formal and public process of becoming a collective of artistic actors there is the possibility of discovering the process of becoming social actors freely engaging in civic dialogic democracy.

The idea of the 'ensemble' as a continuous process of becoming an effective collective for theatre making is at the political heart of AT. Irrespective of local circumstances, the commitment to the idea of the ensemble, rather than the individual, as the irreducible unit of human agency in theatre making corresponds to the idea of social, dialogical and equal engagement in a processual public sphere. This idea foregrounds discussion and critique of the political and pedagogic processes of ensemble making as a pre-requisite of theatre making and how the experience of the ensemble might provide participants with a second order identity as citizens struggling together, on a civic stage, to create and continuously challenge and modify ideas of the 'common good'.

The political/artistic question for AT is how to equip and sustain participants with those formal and public models of process and collective engagement which are necessary to challenge both misrecognition and socio-economic injustice. In both the artistic and social aspects of theatre-making participatory and processual modes of AT might offer the possibility of an artistic model of 'parity of participation'. AT can make a difference to the lives of others by affording them 'minutes of happiness' but also by offering the chance to participate artistically and socially in the practice of freedom.

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