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Creating welcoming spaces in the city: exploring the theory and practice of 'hospitality' in two regional theatres.

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Introduction

> Where might hospitable encounters occur, and what kinds of
> spaces does hospitality produce? Who is able to perform the
> welcoming host, and who can be admitted as guest? And in
> extending hospitality to the other, how should we define our
> individual, communal, or national self? (Molz and Gibson 2007,
> 1).

Sarah Molz and Jennie Gibson argue that there are specific locations of hospitality that often demarcate a physical divide between host and guest and that 'hospitality is *performed* in time and space' (17). As inferred by their questions above, the discourse of hospitality is inseparable from performance, place and power. Influenced by Jacques Derrida's extensive discussions of hospitality, Molz and Gibson explore the imbalance of power relations that often arise between host and guest. Derrida reminds us that the etymology of 'host' is closely linked to '*host*ility'; therefore, to be a 'host' is to be in a position of power which can be used to make the stranger/guest feel welcome or unwelcome in the host's domain (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000). This paper considers the possible manifestations of access, hospitality and belonging in the context of two regional arts venues in the culturally and ethnically diverse city of Coventry, UK: Warwick Arts Centre (WAC) and The Belgrade. In the everyday life of a regional arts venue, who plays the role of the 'host' and who are configured as 'strangers', 'visitors' or 'guests'? Specifically, when young people cross the thresholds of these venues,

how does the arts educator or youth theatre facilitator help to create a sense of conviviality and belonging? To make sense of these broader questions, I will focus on examples of youth theatre practice by detailing the processes and findings of two independent yet interrelated qualitative case studies. Both organisations occupy contrasting sites in the Coventry: WAC is a large multi-arts hub situated within the University of Warwick's campus on the outskirts of the city; The Belgrade is Coventry's largest producing theatre, located in its centre. Whilst the two studies are distinct, I juxtapose them in order to consider the relationship between hospitality and 'place/space' and the multiple ways arts venues might offer young people sites of access, hospitality and belonging within the culturally diverse 'micro-publics' (Amin 2002, 14) of the city.

Methodological overview: connecting two case studies

From 2007 to 2013, I was funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council's Collaborative Doctoral Award (CDA) scheme to develop practice-led methods to investigate the dynamic interactions between notions and perceptions of 'multiculturalism' in relation to WAC's theatre and performance programming and education activities. Specifically, I was investigating what '*positive* multiculturalism' might mean in the context of WAC. Whilst part of my role in WAC was as an ethnographer, the CDA encourages researchers to develop bespoke research methods for the organisation under investigation (Bakhshi et al 2008). My first task was to conduct an audience reception study of WAC's Spring/Summer season 2008 with a selected group of culturally and ethnically diverse WAC users.

Designing the audience questionnaires raised key questions about my positionality within the study. 'Multiculturalism' is a politically loaded term and I was aware that research in this area required a reflexive consideration of power between the researcher and the research participants. Conscious of two critical markers of my identity, my 'whiteness' and my

'Britishness', I was concerned about how I would be perceived by my research subjects. As Yasmin Gunaratnam (2003) reminds us, focussing solely on one's 'ethnic identity' risks essentialism as it omits all the other possible aspects of identification such as socio-economic status, sexuality, personal narratives, etc. I wanted to create space within this study to make sense of my own and WAC users' 'lived experiences of 'race' and ethnicity' (34). To this end, I avoided presenting participants with standardised 'ethnicity' boxes which, Gunaratnam argues, 'can serve to reify 'race' and ethnicity as entities that individuals are born into and inhabit' (19).

Inspired by Kathleen Gallagher's 'identity descriptors' (2007, 66), I invited the participants to describe their ethnicities in their own words in an attempt to engage WAC users in a reflective dialogue about these complex issues. In the final stage of this reception study, I facilitated two ninety minute 'Audience Forums' in WAC for the participants to meet, interact and discuss the productions they had watched, as well as to try to make sense of 'multiculturalism' together. These early innovations and experimentations in engendering openness and dialogue were pertinent to my evolving interest in hospitality.

In the final year of the study when my focus shifted onto WAC's education activities, I carried out a practice-led research intervention in response to the opening of WAC's new space: the Helen Martin Studio (HMS). I worked alongside WAC's Education Director, Brian Bishop, to foster a partnership with a local secondary school, known for its cultural and ethnic diversity and located in an economically deprived part of Coventry. I invited this newly formed youth group, with no previous experience of WAC, to devise a performance for the HMS. Through this, I aimed to investigate the participants' perceptions and experiences of WAC, particularly in relation to notions of 'positive multiculturalism'. When arguing for the positive effects of performance research as intervention, Dwight Conquergood (2002) challenges the

epistemological model of 'critical analysis from a distanced perspective' suggesting that a more

direct and participatory involvement in the research field offers researchers:

> Another way of knowing that is grounded in active, intimate, hands-on
>
> participation and personal connection: 'knowing how' and 'knowing
>
> who.' This is a view from ground level, in the thick of things (146).

By adopting this alternative epistemology, I was able to get 'in the thick of things'. I had

created 'another way of knowing' about WAC's new studio as well as their professed aim to

'widen participation' of 'under-represented local communities' through 'art-form specific

initiatives' (Warwick Arts Centre 2007). In this paper, I am unable to relate details of all of

the pedagogic strategies used to create a welcoming space and foster meaningful engagement.

The focus of Case Study 1 will be the emergence of a strategy we called 'hosting the space'.

After completing this study, I continued to work with WAC to investigate the notion of

'hospitality' in other cognate applied theatre contexts in Coventry (King and Grainger-Clemson

2015). A central feature of this practice was the mobilisation of both public and civic

engagement through cross-institutional collaboration between University of Warwick students,

Coventry-based school pupils and Coventry's refugee and migrant centre (ibid). I revisited this

model of working in 2015, when I became the lead UK researcher in an international, multi-

sited, ethnographic collaborative research study. This three-year study investigates the

concepts of 'hope', 'care' and 'civic engagement' for young people living in five different

countries using three different modes of theatre-making: verbatim, oral history performance

and devising.[1] Gallagher's study invites practitioners to investigate these macro geo-political

concepts through the highly contextualised 'micro-ecologies of the classroom or youth theatre

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[1] The full title of this project is 'Youth, Theatre, Radical Hope and the Ethical Imaginary: An intercultural investigation of drama pedagogy, performance and civic engagement' and is funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, Canada.

space' by focusing on the 'temporary culture of collective theatre-making'.[2] In response, I forged a new partnership with The Belgrade, specifically their outreach youth group in the suburban area of Canley. Case Study 2, therefore, draws out the connections between Gallagher's key concepts and my own interest in creating hospitable, convivial sites for creative collaboration.

Navigating multiculturalism: the emergence of 'hospitality'

My interest in the discourse of 'hospitality' emerged out of a wider investigation of 'multiculturalism' within post-1945 Britain. The genesis of multiculturalism as 'a goal, a concept, an attitude, a strategy and a value' (Kincheloe and Steinberg 1997, 1) or as 'a normative response to the fact of cultural diversity' (Parekh 2006, 5) developed in post-1945 Western societies in response to high levels of immigration after the Second World War. Hospitality long pre-dates the contemporary notion of multiculturalism. The act of giving hospitality to 'the stranger, the sojourner, the traveller, the other' is 'an ancient and persistent question' (Molz and Gibson 2007, 1). Its 'classical origins' (O'Gorman 2007, 1) in Egyptian, Greek and Roman civilisations and its presence in religious scripture and myth position it within the extensive histories of human migration as a central feature of social exchange and encounters with strangers (see, for example, Kearney and Semonovitch 2011).

Central to hospitality, Derrida argues, is a fundamental paradox between politics and ethics. For Derrida (2001), 'ethics *is* hospitality' because 'hospitality is culture itself … [it is] the manner in which we relate to ourselves and to others, to others as our own or as foreigners' (16). Hospitality as ethics *should* involve an unconditional welcome of the stranger; however, the laws of hospitality impose limits and controls on the stranger that render unconditional hospitality impossible (1999; 2001). Following on from Derrida, Mireille Rosello critiques

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[2] I cite Gallagher's research proposal (unpublished).

contemporary notions of multiculturalism questioning the underlying motivations behind the 'hospitality' offered to 'post-colonial immigrants': 'if a nation invites immigrants because they are valuable assets, because it needs them for an economic or demographic purpose, that country is not being hospitable' (2001, 12). This resonates with Seyla Benhabib's discussion of the thresholds that exist between citizen and non-citizen explaining that political membership concerns 'political boundaries' that 'define some as members, others as aliens. Membership, in turn, is meaningful only when accompanied by rituals of entry, access, belonging, and privilege' (2004, 1). This process of differentiating between 'strangers' and 'members' remains a central and problematic feature of multicultural hospitality: who 'belongs' to the nation and who does not? Who is 'recognised' as host and/or guest and who is not?

Unlike the monitored borders of a nation-state, cultural organisations such as WAC and The Belgrade do not have checkpoints that grant or obstruct access, but they may produce symbolic barriers. As Britain's post-1945 immigrants began to settle in the UK, how far did the arts and cultural institutions act as 'accessible' or 'hospitable' spaces? Naseem Khan's seminal report, *The Arts that Britain Ignores* (1976), for example, exposed that minority ethnic artists and groups were, as the title of her report suggests, 'ignored' by the British arts and cultural sector (Khan et al 1976). As suggested by the collection of works represented in Khan's subsequent assessment thirty years later (Khan et al 2006), debates about the superficiality of the industry's openness and accessibility continue.

Recognising the ubiquity of hospitable encounters in everyday life offers a counterpoint to state-sponsored, top-down notions of multiculturalism. Across the diverse fields of cultural studies, human geography and urban planning, scholars have re-directed attention away from government driven understandings of 'multiculturalism' towards the ways the city and its many 'micro-publics' (Amin 2002) might function as dynamic spaces where strangers interact and

negotiate identity through processes of 'everyday multiculturalism' as has been documented by Wise and Velayuthum (2009) and Anita Harris (2013). When discussing the hopeful possibilities of the 'multicultural city', Ash Amin suggests that we should look beyond 'the national frame of race and ethnicity in Britain' (Amin 2002, 1) towards 'the politics of local liveability' (ibid) or, as Giovanni Semi and colleagues have suggested, 'the dynamics, the tensions, the intentions and the meanings of those who produce [multiculturalism] in their daily lives' (Semi et al 2009, 66). In light of this, the following case studies conceptualise two local youth theatres as potential sites of everyday multiculturalism and hospitality – spaces where the messiness of different social, cultural and ethnic identities collide and coalesce.

Facilitation: a preliminary reflection on performing the role of host

In both case studies, as researcher and co-facilitator, I played the role of host. It is necessary, therefore, that I frame my analyses with some detail about my own positionality. Early memories of large and lively family gatherings are central to my experience of hospitality. Music played; jokes were told; stories were recounted; fierce political discussions flowed; delicious food emerged from the tiniest of kitchens. In the domain of the family home, hospitality was about making an effort to make your guests feel welcome and creating a vibrant event in which the host and guest could experience the pleasures of being together. Reflecting on these convivial times, I realise how they have informed my theatre practice with young people. I aim to recreate that sense of aliveness, joy and sociality. Understanding the intricacies of the power dynamics between host and guest and the nuanced exchange of social cues and bodily gestures that foster interaction are critical to my interest in the ways we signal to young people that the theatre space could offer them a temporary site of belonging. As Sheila Preston (2016) reminds us, facilitation often evolves 'in the moment' (3) and in 'context, between people, and against a political backdrop' (17). Hosting is never a neutral act and is contingent upon the complex interplay of relationships that exist within the dynamics of that space.

Therefore, the practice exemplified below is not a 'how to' guide for creating a welcoming space; there is no such template for this kind of phenomenological form of social exchange. Rather, these cases invite reflection about hospitality as a fundamental yet often overlooked aspect of our daily work in the field of drama education and applied theatre.

Case Study 1: WAC

Project summary

The key participants in this project were ten young people, aged 13 to 17. Five of the members described themselves as 'white, British females, from Coventry'. One participant explained that her parents were from India but she had lived in Coventry for most of her life. Another had migrated five years ago from the Democratic Republic of Congo. The three oldest pupils described themselves as 'British Asian, Pakistani heritage'. Alongside the youth group, I recruited three University students with a particular interest and expertise in applied theatre. I refer to them as 'collaborators' and they acted as participant-observers throughout the research process.

The weekly workshops took place at the end of the school day. The first three (ninety minute) workshops took place in the young people's school hall; the following twelve (two hour) workshops in WAC's HMS. The project culminated in a twenty minute 'performance event' in WAC's HMS. Qualitative data collection methods included conducting pre-project questionnaires with the youth group to discern their previous experience of WAC and arts engagement in general. Given my direct role in the research, I followed Donald Schön's model of the reflective practitioner (Schön 1995) to interrogate the dynamics of my own practice within the context of WAC. The sessions were also audio and video-recorded and footage was reviewed after each session. Post-project interviews were conducted with the young people, collaborators, relevant school teachers and WAC's Director and Education Director.

The Helen Martin Studio

According to WAC's Director, Alan Rivett, the HMS was designed as a 'creative space' for the development of new artistic and educational practice as well as for commercial enterprises. Two core principles informed Rivett's design: (1) he wanted the space to be used for 'creative practice and playing in a safe environment' (Rivett 2010); (2) the space's democratic potential:

> We are testing that space in relation to *ownership*. Its design, location, look and feel – everything thing about it – is as a *neutral space* in which anybody should feel comfortable [emphasis mine] (ibid).

For Rivett, such aspirations could be realised through its ambivalent monumnetalism (modern, sandstone bricks), its bareness (creating a 'blank canvass' effect) and its exposure (large windows). However, despite the good intentions of the architectural design, Rivett's claims of 'neutrality' invite reflection. Henri Lefebvre (1991) argues that 'space' is constituted and re-constituted through social practice. Human interaction and exchange are always in flux; therefore, such spaces are open to multifarious experiences and interpretations (ibid). As soon as a space becomes occupied by human presence, its meaning can be contested. Moreover, space is intrinsically linked to issues of access and territory. Lefebvre continues, 'space … is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power' (26). This resonates with Derrida's discussion of the ways 'hospitality' can be perverted by the host (Derrida and Dufourmantelle 2000). Consequently, WAC's studio is not *automatically* an accessible, hospitable, 'safe' and 'neutral' space for those who encounter it. As a practice-led researcher, I was curious to see how far Rivett's ideals of 'ownership', 'creative play' and 'inclusiveness' could be realised in this studio. I aimed to explore its potential as a welcoming, hospitable site.

Navigating WAC: from 'new arrivals' to 'hosts' of the space

In Nobuko Kawashima's analysis of 'audience development' strategies in British cultural and social policy she identifies 'non-attenders' as 'those with little or no access to the arts' (2006, 57). This group's limited socio-economic resources had contributed to the fact that they were 'non-attenders' of WAC and, for most of the group, this was the first time they had been given the opportunity to engage with an arts organisation of any kind. The group had a shared awareness of their 'outsider-ness' to WAC. During the second workshop in the HMS, I invited them to reflect upon their initial feelings about WAC. The exercise involved placing a chair in the centre of the space, explaining that it represented WAC. They used their distance/proximity to the chair as well using gesture to create an image that signified their feelings about WAC. Amy, for example, stood at the furthest point away from the chair, looked towards it with arms folded and a solemn expression. She explained:

> **I was kind of like an outsider, I didn't feel like I was part** of the
> Centre, I'd never been before and seeing all the University students,
> they'd obviously been going for a while, **I didn't feel like I was part**
> **of it.**

Molz and Gibson draw on the work of Sara Ahmed to argue that, in the discourse of 'multicultural hospitality', the host is normatively positioned as the 'insider/native' and the guest as the 'outsider/stranger' (2007, 9). By attempting to create a democratic space in the rehearsal room, I aimed to renegotiate this binary and discover the 'fluidity of the roles of host and guest' (Jeffers 2011, 52).

Informing my understanding of hospitality is Mustafa Dikeç's notion of 'hospitality as engagement' (2002, 236). He argues that the host should do more than merely 'open doors to a stranger' (ibid) and suggests that there is a relationship of *engagement* between host and

guest: 'the guest is as hospitable as the host in that he/she is in engagement with the host while the host recognises the specificities of the guest (ibid). Dikeç's reconceptualisation of the term resonates with the pedagogic principles that underpin applied theatre practice. As host of the drama space, the facilitator seeks to respond to the 'specificities of the guest'. Furthermore, the participant, or 'guest', is not positioned as the passive *receiver* of hospitality; they play an active and integral role in the process of engagement. Helen Nicholson elaborates:

> Practitioners recognise that their role is not to give participants a voice – with all the hierarchical implications that phrase invokes – but to create spaces and places that enable the participants' voices to be heard (2005, 163).

Moreover, given that devising is predicated on the values of collaboration (Govan et al 2007), I hoped to create a supportive yet challenging space in which the young people would feel inspired to become co-producers of artistic practice. However, despite these aspirations, it became evident that devising their own performance was less appealing than putting on a conventional production, typified by Chinonso's repeatedly asked question: 'When will we get our script?' Their initial uncertainties about devising were compounded when they first encountered the HMS. They were unsure about the openness of the space and the large windows that looked out onto the busy university campus. I invited discussion about their first impressions:

> Rachel: Is this the kind of space you can imagine seeing a performance?

> Millie: No, not in this space, because when you think of a performance you think of, like, a stage and chairs.

This triggered a conversation amongst the young people about where the audience would 'sit'. Whilst my collaborators and I were excited by possibilities of responding to this particular site, we realised that the young people needed convincing. For one particular member, Yogendra, the fact that the HMS was open and not demarcated with 'stage' and 'auditorium' areas was a source of anxiety, explaining that he would feel safer if the audience were in seats. Whilst it was tempting to assuage his fears, my collaborators and I wanted to challenge the youth group to reimagine the studio's potential as a performance venue.

We began trying out ways we could use the large windows, both inside and outside the space. Unexpectedly, a game emerged. It involved getting the attention of passing University students. One of the young people, Aadita, noticed how, at night-time, the window became a mirror which led to us improvising a series of dance moves in front of the window. My collaborators and I took the lead by making the dance moves increasingly exaggerated, modelling a willingness to try out ideas and laugh at ourselves. Fostering this spirit of playfulness and being responsive to their suggestions became critical features of our work and, I suggest, led to the gradual development of their trust in the creative process and in us as facilitators. One of my collaborators, Ella, reflected on this dynamic: 'I think they knew that *we* were learning, and I think that's really important ... it wasn't that we had all the answers or that this was a stagnant process'. In her discussion of the interconnections between education and hospitality, Claudia Ruitenberg (2015) argues that the 'concrete contexts of hospitality' should always be 'structurally exposed to the future – to something that they cannot see coming, to something that comes unexpectedly knocking on its door (xii). I suggest that in order to move towards Derrida's notion of *unconditional* hospitality, we need to be willing to be open to such 'unexpected' moments. Nevertheless, such openness is not always possible or desirable; there are inevitable limits to time and space that impose boundaries on the devising process. Alice O'Grady (2013) acknowledges this paradox and suggests that for 'radical

openness' (133) to be realised in the participatory performance space, we often need create codes of conduct to *protect* the interactive encounter. Moreover, offering unfettered freedom can be daunting to novice theatre-makers and this particular youth group struggled, at first, to make suggestions. As community theatre director Chris Johnston (2013) reminds us, 'creative freedom and risk-taking … is entirely dependent on a strong directorial hand' (146). As host of this space, I had to offer the group enough opportunities to play, fail and experiment whilst also providing them with a clear structure that would inspire the creation of performance material.

Running in parallel with our explorations of the space, I planned earlier workshops around Shaun Tan's epic graphic novel *The Arrival* (2007). We made connections between Tan's narrative of human migration and their recent arrival and experiences at WAC. We considered the ways hospitality is 'an embodied and active performance' (Molz and Gibson 2007, 17) in our everyday lives. I invited them to think about what it was like to enter a space for the first time and how this affected our bodily gestures. Drawing on their suggestions, we imagined scenes of 'hospitality' and 'hostility' such as visiting an expensive restaurant and getting on a busy bus in an unfamiliar city and they experimented with playing different kinds of 'hosts' and 'guest/strangers'.

Alongside the devising process, a meta-narrative of 'hosting' was emerging. As host of the drama space, I was mindful that one of our members, Chinonso, had a recent and traumatic experience of migration. Whilst this project set out to investigate the group's lived experiences of 'multiculturalism', I did not want to shine an unwelcome spotlight on his experience. As an outside facilitator with no experience of migration, it would be irresponsible of me to evoke his personal feelings and then leave the school or his carers to deal with the emotional fallout, a tension discussed by Nina in the post-project interview:

> You were so protective over Chinonso … the idea of 'should we
> encroach this personal story because it can be problematic?' … back
> home [in Singapore] that wouldn't have been a problem, we embrace it
> as part of the process.

Paradoxically, by trying to *protect* Chinonso, I risked closing down the opportunity within the rehearsal space for him to share these experiences openly with his fellow group members. Whilst Chinonso went on to play a role in the performance that resonated with his personal experience as a migrant, overall my approach was too cautious. Now, as a more experienced facilitator, I would accommodate Chinonso's story differently.

The performance used a promenade-like arrangement of the open space that framed the *audience* as 'new arrivals' to an unfamiliar city and the young people as 'hosts' who guided them around the space. In the early stages of the project this would have been alien to them, as acknowledged by Gabrielle in a post-project interview:

> When we first came, all of us we thought we were gonna do a stage kind
> of thing and everyone would be sitting down but we said it's cool
> because we're gonna have people joining with us … We're gonna be
> the leaders of them.

This is demonstrative of their gradual shift from being 'outsiders' in WAC to temporary 'hosts', who were able to welcome the audience into *their* space. Although still requiring guidance and support right up until the final performance, their willingness to be in close proximity to a live audience and their capacity to interact and usher the audience around the space with confidence was, in the context of this particular group, an important achievement.

At the end of the project, I conducted individual face-to-face interviews with each of the group members. I repeated the 'chair exercise' described earlier and invited them to create a still image that best represented their up-to-date relationship to WAC. Whilst all of their responses and the nuances of each image cannot be captured here, it is worth noting that they all chose to sit down on the chair that represented WAC:

> Millie: We've been there so often, we've been there so many times, it feels like, more comfortable and we've performed there … so it feels more like our space.

> Chinonso: I'm chilled, at home, it's my own space now.

> Aadita: Everyone was really welcoming and really welcomed you and the more times we went there, the more you felt so comfortable and you knew you could be yourself.

> Natalie: It's like you feel at home, like we do in the play, it's our space, we got used to it, the way you taught us and the way we played the games, it made us feel more comfortable.

Recurring expressions of feeling 'welcome' and 'at home' in WAC were heartening to hear, particularly given the research objectives of this project. However, such positive feedback is not unique to this project. As Joe Winston and colleagues identify, part of the drama educator's *responsibility* is to enable the drama space 'to become a 'homeplace' … as quickly as possible by encouraging [participants] to feel secure and included within it, to come to feel it as theirs' (Winston, Lo, and Wang 2010, 12). Rather, the key finding here is the group's shared awareness that this process of engagement had happened *over time* and was, in part, due to the methods used to make them feel welcome. Hospitality, as Dikeç and colleagues explain,

involves the making of space *and* time for each other: it is a form of social exchange that is both spatial and durational (Dikeç, Clark, and Barnett 2009, 12). Whilst WAC's purpose-built studio is a sign that WAC is dedicated to increasing 'access' for its multiple users, access to the space alone is not necessarily enough to foster meaningful engagement. As Tim Cresswell (2004) suggests 'when humans invest meaning in a portion of space and then become attached to it in some way … it becomes a place' (10). This chimes with Nicholson's argument that in order to feel a sense of belonging participants 'need to be recognised by others as integral to producing that space' (2011, 209). It was the *time* we invested in creating our ensemble, devising new material and performing in this new space that demonstrated to these young people that their voices were valued in this public arena.

Case Study 2: The Belgrade's Canley Youth Theatre

Project Summary

We started this oral history performance project in April 2016 when there were eleven core senior CYT members and nine were able to perform in the final presentation in June 2016. Two of young people were also members of The Belgrade's Black Youth Theatre. However, the majority of this predominantly white group did not identify as being in an ethnic minority. The weekly two hour workshops took place in CYT's youth space in Canley. Some additional workshops were added close to the performance event (approx. 34 hours in total contact time). We collected their most poignant memories of participating in youth theatre, as well as interviewing past CYT members about their experiences. I also invited them to reflect on what *matters* to them in their lives: memories they wanted to share, challenges they have faced, role models they have encountered, and their aspirations for the future. This process culminated in a devised performance entitled 'The Museum of Living Stories' at the University of Warwick. We were joined by our fellow international collaborators in the final week of this process. Throughout the project, I worked alongside The Belgrade's Education and General Manager,

Claire Simpson, and CYT's director, Jouvan Fucinni. As I will go on to discuss, Angela Evans, Youth Worker for Coventry's Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate, was also present during all workshops and played a significant role in supporting CYT.

A key feature of the project was the involvement of eight University students. Two postgraduates were embedded in the project throughout its duration: Emily worked as an ethnographer and Hanzhi, supported by two undergraduates, made an audio and visual documentation of the process. Further to this, four postgraduate students were positioned as my 'assistants': Nurul from Malaysia, Phillipe from Portugal, Laura from the UK and Amy from China.

Unlike Case Study 1, I was stepping into an already-established youth group and part of my role was to observe and understand more about the ethos and dynamics of their ensemble. As a research intervention, however, it was my responsibility to design and facilitate the workshops with the support and input of Jouvan. The involvement of Emily and Hanzhi enabled me to concentrate solely on the practice, in the knowledge that we could triangulate our findings after each session. Furthermore, we were able to use the transcripts of the weekly sessions to create the script for final performance.

Canley Youth Theatre

The Belgrade offers young people free access to a range of five 'in-house' youth theatres and two 'outreach' youth theatres in Canley (Junior and Senior). Arguably, the very fact that The Belgrade has established 'outreach youth theatres' is an outward sign of their hospitality towards young people in Coventry. Its Community and Education team targeted Canley because it has 'high levels of multiple deprivation in both national and city terms' (The Warwick Commission 2015, 29) as well as its history of low arts engagement (Communities and Local Government 2010). Whilst CYT was established in 2003, in early

2014, a serendipitous and unique partnership was established between The Belgrade and Coventry's Youth Services in Canley. Jouvan had just become the group's Director and the weekly workshops had, up until that point, taken place in what he described as a 'dark and uninviting' high school hall. On a cold day in January day 2014, when the heating ceased working, Jouvan took the youth group to a neighbouring leisure centre to keep warm. Realising that this family-oriented venue had a youth room available for hire he brokered a partnership with Angela. She had been running a range of youth services from this site in Canley for over ten years. Not only was she able to provide CYT with free access to the youth room, she also offered her expertise in recruiting new members, including a number of 'Looked after Children'.[3]

Gallagher's interest in the ways drama education can *mobilise* 'hope' was an integral motivation behind making connections between the University and Canley. Gallagher and Neelands (2011) frame the city as 'a charged and symbolic thing, as well as a real, material, lived, reality' (152). In this part of Coventry, the University represents knowledge, investment and cultural capital whilst Canley is symbolic of economic neglect. When juxtaposed against each other, I hoped to highlight the polarities that exist between these sites and invite reflection upon the social injustices that pervade the city. Anecdotally, many Warwick students talk of 'the Warwick bubble', a metaphor describing the sense of separation the campus has from its surrounding neighbourhoods. Likewise, Angela informed me that there is a perception amongst Canley residents that Warwick students were temporary occupants, coming in and out of Canley but rarely mixing with local people. In response to this, I wanted to bring an interdisciplinary and culturally diverse group of postgraduate students into collaboration with

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[3] 'Looked after Children' refer to young people in state care i.e. foster care.

CYT. I aimed to explore the multiple, complex connections and disconnections between these two diverse sites, using oral history performance as our key method for creative collaboration.

Creating spaces for conviviality in Canley

Alongside the discourse of hospitality, my investigations into 'positive multiculturalism' were informed by Paul Gilroy's discussion of 'conviviality' (2004). Gilroy observes that the emergence of a 'convivial culture' in Europe has offset the feelings of 'postcolonial melancholia'. For Gilroy, 'conviviality' offers a new and more positive way of interpreting 'multiculturalism' (65) and draws attention to the 'ordinary multiculturalism that distinguishes us and orients our hopes for a better country' (xi) and, in particular, focuses on examples from Britain's cities in which 'the processes of cohabitation and interaction' have 'made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life' (ibid). Within such urban spaces, Gilroy argues, there are signs of Britain's 'ability to live with alterity without becoming anxious, fearful, or violent' (ibid). In light of current geopolitical uncertainty in Europe, following the UK's decision to leave the European Union, the 'postcolonial melancholia' identified by Gilroy in 2004 may well have won out. However, his hopeful provocation seems more urgent than ever:

> We need to know what sorts of insight and reflection might actually help increasingly differentiated societies and anxious individuals to cope successfully with the challenges involved in *dwelling comfortably in proximity to the unfamiliar without being fearful or hostile* [emphasis mine] (Gilroy 2004, 3).

By devising an oral history performance together, this research intervention aimed to create a space for 'convivial interaction' between University students and CYT. Nadine Holdsworth (2010) connects Gilroy's notion of 'conviviality' with processes of theatre-making:

Theatre provides a heightened space where people come together to create work that relies on the collision and integration of different perspectives and skills and that the qualities of listening, looking and responsiveness are highly regarded activities (72).

As discussed in Case Study 1, however, a 'convivial culture' in the rehearsal space has to be nurtured over time with the facilitator playing a significant role in creating the conditions for collaboration. I wanted to understand the ways in which Jouvan and Angela had fostered trust amongst CYT members.

One key method was the use of 'storytime', a weekly ritual in which the group shared a tale from their previous seven days. Jouvan had set some rules: each member had to participate; contributions could be no more than three minutes in length; they had to listen to each other. Jouvan modelled a style of storytelling that was relaxed, confessional, funny and playful, putting the more self-conscious members at ease. In tandem with Angela, they had created a space for the sharing personal anecdotes that often referenced bigger political issues at the time such as the murder of Jo Cox MP, Brexit and Donald Trump's presidential campaign. Disagreement between members was welcomed and time was made to make sense of controversial issues. When reviewing footage of storytime, two features are striking: firstly, this ritual offered a space for them to perform their evolving identities in a supportive and joyful environment and, secondly, there was real pleasure taken not only in telling one's story but in *listening* to each other. For this particular group, storytime was critical in their development as an ensemble. Rosello suggests that:

Being at home is being where you can not only eat and drink but you also invite someone to eat, to drink, to chat. Being at home is being

where you can be the host, where you can offer hospitality (Rosello 2001, 18).

This was most noticeable when, in Week 4 of the project, I introduced the four postgraduate assistants to CYT members. Mike, one of the youngest CYT members, suggested that the newcomers should join in with storytime. Victoria was affectionately known for her melodramatic style and fast-talking and when she started to tell her tale, Josh raised his hand to make a suggestion. Recognising that three of the postgraduates spoke English as a second language, he encouraged his peers to observe a new rule: slow down when telling their story so that everyone understands. Josh's offer of hospitality, his capacity to make their circle more open and inclusive, was testimony to the ways *he* was able to host the space.

When designing the project, I had imagined that the assistants would take on a dual role as *both* 'host' and 'guest'; they would support the young people as assistant facilitators whilst simultaneously participating in the project. However, I had not anticipated the extent to which they would become co-collaborators with the CYT members. Recognising that they had impressive physical performance skills, Jouvan and I started to plan activities that embedded them more firmly in the devising process. Three weeks into joining the project, one of the postgraduate assistants, Nurul expressed a desire to be in the final performance alongside the youth members. Her enthusiasm to participate was noteworthy because she had begun the process with apprehensions about her own sense of 'stranger-ness'. In the post-project interview, she revealed:

I was conscious of my religion. I was aware that perceptions of Muslims have been negative in the media and I wanted a chance to show a different side of Muslims. I wasn't sure how they would respond to me.

Nurul's sense of uneasiness was not unfounded. This project was taking place during the lead up to the EU referendum and, as Piotr Cap identifies, there was a 'language of fear' that circulated public discourse (2017, 73), particularly around Muslim migration into Europe. Nurul explained that she was surprised to find the young people so welcoming 'at the end of the day, they were like my family. They were nice to strangers and, through the process, we got to know each other'. When I asked Nurul what had enabled this process of familiarisation, she cited her involvement in co-creating a scene with another postgraduate assistant, Laura, and one of the young people, Kelly. As part of our devising process, group members brought in a precious item from home. Nurul presented her traditional sarong batik from Malaysia; Laura showed her homemade 'hen party' quilt from Birmingham; Kelly brought the blanket her mum had wrapped her in when she was born in Coventry. We invited them to re-perform their individual memories as well as creating moments of connection with each other's stories. These three fabrics became signifiers of their differing identities. For Nurul, the objects were a starting point for making sense of each other:

> We were talking about our cultures and it helped me to know them better and for them to know more about me. It lessened a barrier… the way we relate to each other's experiences and the ways we built things together with respect, responsibility and by being humble and cooperative. It changed the way I see things.

Her experiences resonate with Wan-Jung Wang's analysis of the devising process involved in creating an oral history performance:

> Through the sharing of personal narratives, the act of witnessing one another's life experiences engaged all of the participants through listening, responding, reacting and including one another (2010, 566).

Nurul's positive experience pertains to wider questions of hospitality in the context of the city.

Amin critiques the idea that the city contains ready-made sites for conviviality arguing that there are different 'social dynamics' produced by the 'co-presence' of strangers in a busy high street, for example, compared to 'collaboration' between strangers that might take place in a youth theatre space (2002; 2012). He suggests that the multiple 'micro-publics' of the city provide sites for strangers to make sense of each other (Amin 2002, 14). I suggest CYT is one such 'micro-public'. Over time and with supportive interventions, Amin argues, 'engagement with strangers in a common activity disrupts easy labelling of the stranger as enemy and initiates new attachments' (Amin 2002, 15). He discusses the possible value of bringing strangers into sustained contact through 'mutual endeavour' or 'situated practice' (2012, 37). Rather than enforcing the *coercive* mixing of diverse groups, he suggests that it may be possible to engender conviviality by focusing less on the need for 'recognition and reconciliation' (56) and more on the productive outcomes of 'joint endeavour' and 'knowing in collaborative doing' (ibid). I suggest that collaborative theatre-making is an example of what Amin describes as the 'micro-practices of creative forms of joint endeavour' (ibid).

Given the University's proximity to CYT's youth space, it is possible that the young people and students may have crossed paths, remaining strangers to one another. Amartya Sen argues that 'multiculturalism' as a social practice can only exist if there is *interaction* within and between diverse cultures, 'having two styles or traditions coexisting side by side, without the twain meeting, must really be seen as "plural monoculturalism"' (2007, 157). It is only by forging a collaboration – by creating points of access – that this sort of conviviality can be realised. Furthermore, collaborative theatre-making offers points of connection not just through dialogue and discussion but also through the artistry involved in reimagining each other's stories for performance. Kelly and Lauren *took the time* to learn a traditional Malaysian song that came from Nurul's particular town. Taking time to rehearse and taking care of the detail

in each other's stories is part of what James Thompson refers to as 'care aesthetics' which, he suggests, can be 'realised in more enduring, crafted encounters between people (2015, 437). Critically, Nurul was able to perform an important aspect of her identity as a Malaysian, Muslim female whilst also taking on the roles of Kelly's family and Laura's friends. This interweaving of identities and the fluidity with which they embodied each other's stories correlates with Gilroy's conceptualisation of 'conviviality' as an engagement with 'radical openness' in which notions of 'fixed identity' are thrown into chaos (2004, xi).

Engendering this kind of conviviality requires more than access to a physical space; it is predicated on the ability of the facilitator-as-host to manage these interactions. Mixing of this nature 'need[s] organisational and discursive strategies that are designed to build a voice, to foster a sense of common benefit, to develop confidence among disempowered groups, and to arbitrate when disputes arise (Sandercock 2006, 45). The unique partnership between Jouvan and Angela provided CYT with access to the *expertise* of a trained theatre director and a trained youth worker who, over time, had established a supportive youth ensemble able to offer hospitality to others.

Conclusion

Derrida argues that for hospitality to exist there must be points of access. However, such thresholds demarcate an inside/outside and, 'as soon as there is a door and windows, it means that someone has the key to them and consequently controls the conditions of hospitality' (2001, 14). WAC and The Belgrade have long histories of inviting multiple users across their thresholds; as part-publically funded institutions, they are aware of their responsibility to welcome and 'give access' to local communities. This paper invites reflection upon the nature of this welcome. Whilst case-study research may be criticised for its lack of generalisability, Helen Simons argues that it is precisely the 'in-depth particularisation' (2009, 167) of case-

study that enables the researcher to present 'complex, multiple realities and experiences … for policy-makers to increase their understanding of particular situations' (170). Likewise, Estelle Barrett and Barbara Bolt explain that practice-led research has an 'innovative and critical potential' due to 'its capacity to generate personally situated knowledge' (2007, 2). By focusing on the specificities of these context-bound cases, I have aimed to reconceptualise youth theatre practice through the lens of hospitality. Case Study 1 asks what it means to be 'open', 'welcoming' and 'accessible' within the context of a newly formed youth theatre group and their evolving relationship with WAC. Case Study 2 focuses on an already-established youth theatre group and their capacity to welcome university students into *their* space. Both cases consider how the restrictive binary of the host-guest relationship might be reimagined to produce dynamic and inclusive notions of shared space and togetherness that could result in refreshed and more meaningful ways of connecting polarised parts of the city.

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