The Cultural Geographies of Community Theatre

Yvonne Natalie Robinson

Department of Geography
University College London

Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of PhD
University of London, 2004
Abstract

Against a backdrop of growing interest in performance geographies and performative notions of embodiment and social identity, this thesis critically examines the geographies of 'community theatre' (or 'theatre in the community'). Drawing on in-depth qualitative research, the study is concerned to analyse the forms of 'community' presumed in and produced through the performances of community theatre companies in London. It focuses in particular on detailed case studies of three companies - London Bubble, Outside Edge and Tamasha - which were chosen to examine how different engagements with the notion of 'community' are made through performance and practice.

This thesis demonstrates how practices of community theatre have been positioned marginally to that of mainstream and established theatre. Through the empirical analysis, it examines both the opportunities and contradictions that an engagement with the discourse and practice of 'community' brings for community theatre companies. It also illustrates how 'theatre in the community' companies mobilise themselves in ways which may be both subversive, democratic and powerful.

Engaging with forms of performative art that work with ideas of community and notions of communality articulated through performance, the thesis helps to rectify the absence of geographic research on the social spatial constitution of the arts. In so doing, it seeks to contribute to emergent understandings of the social and cultural geographies of performance.
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Abbreviations

AA   Alcoholics Anonymous
ADF  Asian Dub Foundation
BAD  Bubble Adult Drama
ITC  Independent Theatre Council
KOFT Kettle of Fish
LA   London Arts
LBG  London Borough Grants
LIPA Liverpool Institute for Performing Arts
GLC  Greater London Council
NA   Narcotics Anonymous
Acknowledgements

This thesis is the culmination of what has been a long and at times difficult project. I could not have completed this project without the help of many individuals and organisations which have proved invaluable to the research. I would like to thank all of the 'community theatre' companies that agreed to take part in this study, and also the participants and audience members who shared their experiences with me. A special thank you to artistic director of The Combination, John Turner, who took time out of his busy schedule to talk to me and also very generously, provided me with his paper on 'Community Theatre'. I also want to thank Gabrielle Moss at Besht Tellers for her helpful contributions regarding the relevant sources for identifying 'theatre in the community' companies in the early stages of the research. And similarly, Tony Craze at L.A. and Nick Owen at LIPA whom verified the companies I needed to get in touch with.

I also want to acknowledge the support I have received from those in the Geography Department. I would like to thank my supervisor James Kneale for being true and believing in me; and Claire Dywer, Jaquie Burgess and Divya Tolia-Kelly for the enthusiasm they have shown towards the project.

Also, my friends and family, especially Odene Johnson, Tracey Commock, Niki Baiddoo, Antony Thompson, Beverley Banton and Christian Clarke, who have supported me from the beginning and continue to do so.

Finally, I am grateful for the grant I received from the ESRC (Award Number: R00429834660), and also for the financial support, love and understanding I have always had from Mum and Dad. I dedicate this thesis to my Mum - who has and always will be an inspiration to me - and to Elroy Stewart, for his patience, his love and for being my rock.
“A beautiful place may never bring about an explosion of life, while a haphazard hall may be a tremendous meeting place; this is the mystery of the theatre…”

~ Peter Brook, The Empty Space
Chapter One

Introduction

Mr Bishop  It’s just that I’m so surprised that you’ve returned my call, that’s all... No, I really think this play will tickle your fancy... Well yes, I know that Mr Travail, I’m quite aware that you don’t review community theatre, but I’ve also heard that you are a man who’s prepared to back brave new work, and I really think that that’s what this is... Oh that’s superb news! Thank you very much... I think you’ll like this play...  

~ Harold Bishop, in ‘Neighbours’ (29.04.03).

It is ironic that ‘Mr Bishop’ - a creation of the hit Australian soap drama, ‘Neighbours’ - should be made the mouthpiece of ‘community theatre’. Were it not for the advent of television - or more precisely, film and cinema - the ‘theatre’ and its performances would not have been so thoroughly displaced (Auslander, 1999). And yet, while such displacement has meant that the established theatre in Britain has become a largely ‘middle-class’ institution (see, Davies, 1987; and Reynolds, 1992), for theatre in the community, the quest to reinvent ‘theatre’ - so that it no longer plays a limited role in most people’s lives - becomes increasingly significant. Community theatre thus widens possibilities for an inclusive and accessible theatre experience by re-visioning the ‘creative’ process itself. In this, it challenges distinctions between performers and spectators and between professional and ‘amateur’ artists, and reconfigures traditional notions of ‘performing spaces’ by (generally) taking theatre out of the predefined structures of theatre buildings. In seeking to attract a wide range of audiences - and particularly ‘non-traditional’ theatregoers (i.e., ethnic minorities, the disabled, women, gays) - community theatre also attempts to involve spectators during performances and after, in ‘post performance’ discussions.

The success obtained through such experimentation - i.e., a more direct and democratic theatrical experience - is well known. Yet in spite of this, there remains much prejudice within the art world and in the ‘popular imaginary',
against theatre in the community. Community theatre is generally distinguished from 'high art', 'established' or 'mainstream' theatre, and tends to be regarded as a substandard genre that is constricted in its artistic outlook. 'Mr Bishop' alludes to this bias against theatre in the community - and as such, to the largely marginal position that community theatre occupies within established art hierarchies - in his astonishment, 'surprise' that the theatre critic, 'Mr Travail' has returned his call. And yet, so thorough is Mr Bishop in his praise of community theatre - that is, in conveying that the play is a 'brave new work' and will 'tickle Mr Travail's fancy' - that Mr Travail breaks with tradition and agrees to review the community play.

It is hard to imagine that this would happen in reality. The national media seldom reviews community theatre, and are more inclined to report on theatre that occurs in 'traditional' arts milieu - that is, in established theatre buildings which possess proscenium stages and fixed seating, etc. Their attitudes reflect the common assumption that community theatre yields amateur performances and devalues the 'art' of theatre. In chapter four, I will argue that this kind of thinking is not only at odds with the way community theatre practitioners feel about their work, but stems from community theatre's concern to involve community participants in the making and staging of theatre. It follows that the involvement of participants in the creation and performances of community theatre, raises for many critics the question of whether it is possible to derive artistic satisfaction from community-based performance. While the arguments of chapter four will suggest that it is, the question of a 'community theatre aesthetic' is inherently complex. This is because community theatre derives its impetus from other questions, which relate to the 'illuminative' function of theatre, and its ability to empower subjects by developing self-awareness and understanding.
Much of the performative power of community theatre, therefore, comes from the inclusion and involvement of participants in the creative process - which is often based on the authentic personal stories of participants - and from the fact that community artists have access to, and become socio-culturally empowered through, democratised performance. In other words, by primarily existing to strengthen and empower the communities it serves, community theatre creates, and therefore functions according to its own, distinctive aesthetics. While this means that community theatre performances are different to mainstream and established theatre productions, it does not mean that they are inferior. Indeed, in rejecting such notions, this thesis will show how the diverse faces of theatre in the community complicate and render problematic, simple assumptions about the aesthetic efficacy of community theatre.

Community theatre, as we shall see, appears in various guises throughout this thesis. This is a mark of both its incredible mobility and inherent dynamism. There are a number of different ways (which will be elaborated in chapter two), in which we might think about community theatre. As a concept, it relies on the linking of two terms - 'community' and 'theatre' - each of which carries a different burden of meaning and connotation. 'Community' offers both ideal and pragmatic vision. On the one hand, it is imbued with the spirit of romanticism, offering the seductive myth of an organic and harmonious world we have lost, but can recuperate. Implicit to this representation, are notions of 'the common good', of 'unity', 'cohesion', and the belief that a return to 'community' will right all that is wrong with the world. On the other hand, community can refer to a dynamic process which celebrates and engages with difference. In this sense, it is a forward-looking vision, which emphasises possibilities for the future, embracing innovation and continuity. 'Theatre' similarly conjures up a variety of powerful associations: It can call to mind the place of performance, indoor staging and scripted dramas. It may also be
used in reference to the popular plays of Shakespeare, or employed - with much greater intimations of grandness and flamboyancy - when describing the 'West End' and 'Broadway' traditions of entertainment.

Community theatre, then, could logically be understood as a theatrical art - with both 'popular' and 'exclusive' tendencies - which seeks to produce collective action and a sense of community, while also engaging with questions of difference and cultural hybridity.

Yet as I will show, such a conceptualisation of theatre in the community - while providing useful explanation of what community theatre might be - fails, in a practical sense, to fully encapsulate what community theatre is. And I will outline the reasons for this shortly. Before I do so, however, I must briefly answer a question which has undoubtedly occurred to some readers: 'what does the cultural geographies of community theatre refer to?' A central theme of the thesis, the cultural geographies of community theatre refers not simply to the spatialities of theatre in the community but more broadly to the symbolic and material geographies embedded in the spaces of community theatre. A cultural geographic analysis of community theatre provides an opportunity to examine the spatialised contours of performance, and to attend to space and spatial issues such as accessing community-based performances, the location of particular companies, and the different sites of performances, i.e., theatre buildings, community halls, parks etc. In exploring exactly what a cultural geographic perspective on community theatre attends to in chapter two, I will reveal the different and varied geographies of theatre in the community. Indeed, that the geographies of community theatre are varied is symptomatic of the bewildering variety of community theatre companies practising in London, a fact which also relates to why any attempt to offer an exact definition of what community theatre is remains problematic.
This difficulty of conceptualising community theatre animates my discussion of contemporary approaches to theatre in the community in chapter four. The chapter makes the point that there are many different kinds of community theatre companies operating in London and that these companies invest in intricate - and often, multiple - understandings of 'community'. There are, for example, groups which seek to create participation opportunities by staging theatre in, with and for communities (e.g., Arc Theatre Ensemble and Kettle of Fish). Then there are those which aim, through community theatre events, to enrich lives and nurture creative ambitions (e.g., All Change). There are also companies (e.g., the Unicorn Theatre and Krazy Kat Theatre), which focus on the 'young', and those which concern themselves with the 'elderly' (e.g., Age Exchange), the 'homeless' (e.g., Cardboard Citizens) and 'ethnic minorities' (e.g., Nitro and Besht Tellers).

This list does not pretend to be exhaustive. What it does do, however, is give a sense of the broad spectrum of community theatre companies practising in London. This variety in itself has made it necessary to classify the different types of work in an attempt to understand more fully the various methods of approach (see chapter three, box 3.3). While such classification has proven instructive, distinctions between the various types are not as straightforward as one might assume. This is because many of the approaches overlap and, as will be seen, converge in complex and subtle ways.

Because of the diversity of companies working in London, I have chosen to write in most detail about three groups (see chapters five, six and seven), which - as well as providing particularly good examples of the different types of work - present alternative accounts of the relationship between 'theatre' and 'community'. In amplifying a particular approach to 'community' in theatre, each case brings to bear a different perspective on the meaning of community theatre and how it should be conceived. Any comparisons made
of the groups have been restricted to the aims, form and outlook of each case study, and I have tried to avoid showing bias towards any one company. In this respect, the varying lengths of chapters five, six and seven in no way reflects the importance of each case study. There are good logistical reasons for the particular size of chapters, and these relate to the nature of the research carried out with the companies, and the period of time spent with each group, subjects which are covered more fully in the research methodology (chapter three).

Similarly, the decision to provide detailed profiles of specific groups has not been taken to undermine the great gains to be had from the vast number of other practitioners working in the field. Instead, I seek to explore in greater depth the issues - initially outlined in the context of chapter four - which have come to take centre stage in debates about community theatre. I am aware, of course, that in taking such a decision, I am - to a certain degree - constrained to focus on the issues which are pertinent to the three groups. And ultimately this is why they have been chosen: because, while engaging fully with the questions that spark debates (amongst practitioners, critics, workers etc), about theatre in the community, the cases collectively allow me to address the aims and questions of the thesis.

I shall go on to outline the aims and questions of this project shortly. Before I do so, however, it is important to explain some of the terminology used throughout the thesis. I often use the terms 'community theatre' and 'theatre in the community' interchangeably. This is because I do not intend to make any distinctions between them. When employing either term, I am referring to 'theatre' and 'performance' based work that is specifically geared towards the creation of 'community' and/or which is performed by, created with and centred on 'communities'. In being somewhat 'loose' in my usage of the terms, I invite a more contemporary and sophisticated notion of theatre in the
community. This, I hope, will help to rectify the marginal position community theatre occupies in relation to 'established' and 'mainstream' theatre. Both 'established theatre' and 'mainstream theatre', are terms used in the thesis to denote permanent and largely commercial buildings, constructed specifically to house performance. The former implies 'fixity', 'groundedness', 'tradition', and the latter connotes 'popularity', 'sophistication' and 'large scale'. Where necessary, I have explained other terms in the context of the chapter they appear.

The aims of this thesis can be framed as follows:

a) To explore the forms of community produced through the performances and practices of community theatre companies, as well as their assumptions about community.

b) To examine the socio-spatial constitution of community theatre and its performances.

c) To examine the forms of participation, inclusion and exclusion which characterise community theatre.

d) To challenge stereotypical assumptions about community theatre.

These aims can be met by answering the following research questions:

1. What forms of community theatre are in existence in London?

2. What are the motivations behind community theatre workers becoming involved in community theatre?
3. What spatial strategies and metaphors characterise the practice and performance of community theatre?

4. What consumption practices characterise community theatre?

5. What effect(s) does the production of community theatre have on identity formation?

6. How do notions of inclusion, access and involvement impact the practice and performances of community theatre companies?

The chapters that follow develop the above themes through an investigation into the 'cultural geographies of community theatre'. Although certain issues recur - for instance, the ideological relationship between 'established' and 'community' theatre and the artistic status of theatre in the community - their overall significance becomes clear in the more specific contexts of chapters four, five, six and seven. The central thread linking the chapters is the nature of and relation between, 'theatre' and 'community'. Tracing the nature of each individually as well as their connections, each chapter delves into the enormous complexity of the amalgam 'community theatre'.

Chapter Two presents a review of the academic literatures which theoretically inform the empirical work. The review is divided in three parts. The first part attempts to expand the horizon for understanding community theatre, by tracing its genealogy. This history is then used in a comparison of the earlier community theatre movement and contemporary approaches to theatre in the community. Here, particular emphasis is placed on different notions of community theatre, and the place of 'community' in conceptualising such notions. Then, in the latter part of the section, I examine the theatre and performance literature, and consider the theoretical significance of distinguishing between 'theatre' and 'performance' in relation to community
theatre. Considering these issues leads me to examine, in more depth, the problematic of 'community' in the second part of the chapter. I begin by looking at the way in which the concept of community has been conceptualised within 'anti-urban' arguments, before examining how geographers have attempted to rethink ideas of community. In part three, I examine the arts and geography literature. First, I consider the context for the development of the arts as a legitimate area of geographical study, before going on to look at geographic work on the theatre. Then I explore how the language of theatre and performance has been used by geographers to rethink ideas of identity and community formation more performatively. Secondly, in the latter part of the section, I examine the geographical spaces of community theatre. I conclude part three by assessing the analytical and radical potential of community theatre to matters of space and place. Chapter Two therefore, reviews and sets the theoretical scene for future mappings of community theatre.

Chapter Three sets out the methodological framework used in researching community theatre companies. I begin with a discussion of the research design, assessing its effectiveness in relation to addressing the research questions. Against other methodologies, I argue that in-depth, semi-structured interviews and participant observation offer the most potential for the research project. I then examine the specifics of the research in practice. After showing how the sample of community theatre companies was obtained, I go on to describe the nature of the interviewing process. I then turn to the construction of the case studies. First, I describe how the case studies were chosen, and in doing so, outline the general characteristics of each company. Second, I explore the ethnographic procedures undertaken with each company and discuss in particular, the insider/outsider problematic. In concluding this chapter, I discuss my experiences and positioning as a 'Black'
woman, an actress and researcher in the field, and as such an 'outsider' to the communities I research.

Chapter Four, ‘Community Theatre/Theatre in the Community’, resumes the exploration of community, theatre and performance begun in chapter two. As the first of four substantial analytical chapters, however, it does so through an analysis of current approaches to theatre in the community. The chapter is composed of one main section - ‘Contemporary Practices of Community Theatre: community, text and performance’ - which is further divided into five main subsections. The first of these sections, 4.2.1, explores the community theatre proposed by the Half Moon Young People's Theatre and Theatre Royal Stratford East. Here, I will be concerned with an idea of community that is defined by place or locality. The second section, 4.2.2, examines the community theatre espoused by Kettle of Fish, Proteus and Arc Theatre Ensemble, which can be seen taking theatre to communities. The third section, 4.2.3, brings another conception of community theatre to bear, through the examination of the culturally specific theatres of Nitro, Besht Tellers, Afro International, Tara Arts, Talawa and Theatro Technis. The group specific theatres of Age Exchange, Spare Tyre and Strathcona are explored in section 4.2.4. And finally, in section 4.2.5, I look at broad-based arts companies such as All Change, Hoxton Hall and Theatre Venture. In examining the different faces of theatre in the community, the principal aim of this chapter is to disrupt stereotypical assumptions about community theatre.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven, offer case studies of community theatre. Chapter Five, ‘Community Theatre: Anywhere that theatre’s not? The Case of the London Bubble’, profiles the work of the most obviously 'traditional' of the community theatre companies examined in this thesis. The London Bubble, which puts on populist and classical theatre in the open air, poses interesting questions about 'community' and its relationship to theatre by taking theatre to
communities. Focussing on two areas of company practice - the professional producing side and the participatory work - I detail experiences of participation, and examine the practical contexts in which community is made. Chapter Six, 'Community Theatre: A Vehicle for Change? The Case of Outside Edge', continues the concern with community and participation through the analysis of Outside Edge Theatre Company. The group specific theatre of Outside Edge engages with the 'underworld' of drugs and addiction to laboriously construct performance that is potentially capable of changing lives. My task in this chapter, then - while investigating the process of participation in an extensive workshop programme pioneered by Outside Edge - is to examine whether Outside Edge's theatre can be seen as an instrument for change. The final empirical chapter, 'Community Theatre: Demystifying the Role of Asians in Making Theatre? The Case of Tamasha Theatre Company', examines the connection between community and identity, through an investigation of culturally specific theatre. My purpose here, is to show how Tamasha's desire to engender an awareness of 'Asian' theatre has led to the company moving in 'mainstream' directions. In putting the case for a particular way of thinking about community theatre, chapters five, six and seven present further challenges to the ways in which community theatre is commonly conceptualised.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis. I draw together the main themes of the thesis to make a series of concluding points about the cultural geographies of community theatre. I comment on the common concerns of theatre in the community and on what the thesis has achieved.

Finally, in this introduction, I think it is important to say that in writing about 'community theatre', I have tried to use a writing style that captures the resonance and flavour of the topic. I am aware, of course, that in writing about a 'moving', 'performing' and 'embodied' practice, I have not chosen the most
appropriate means of conveying the performative and transformative power of theatre. Because, however, this is also an academic study, it has been necessary to participate in certain theoretical debates and, ultimately, this has been done through words. My way forward, then, has been to use a writing style, which is capable of meeting both the intellectual and performative objectives of the project. At one level this has necessitated a narrative use of prose. At another, it has required a more analytical and critical voice. In employing both voices throughout the thesis, and particularly in the last three empirical chapters, passages from the research diary have been placed in between texts of theory. While this has in some instances created inevitable contradictions - which I attend to in the contexts in which they appear - my main objective throughout this thesis has been to honour neither critical or narrative voice.
Chapter Two

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This thesis is about the cultural geographies of 'community theatre'. In part, 'community theatre' refers to forms of performative art that work with ideas of 'community', and as such, this project is about the spatialities through which community theatre companies map notions of 'community' and 'communality' through their performances (see Rose, 1997). Yet theatre in the community also refers to an energetic field of cultural performance which operates on the cutting edge between performing arts and cultural intervention (see van Ervan, 2001). As a performing art 'community theatre' pertains both to the 'artistic event', and to aesthetic practices that are marked by inclusive politics. As a form of cultural intervention, community theatre can be seen as a critical tool used in the healing process of asserting culture and (politically) identity (Plastow, 1998: 2), or in mobilising the disempowered, marginalised and ‘oppressed’.¹ In this way, I am also concerned with debates about the socio-political significance of contemporary live performance, and about the nature of relationships between performance and theatre (Auslander, 1997; Kershaw, 1999).

It follows then, that an investigation of the cultural geographies of community theatre, is simultaneously an inquiry into the relationship between performance and community, community and geography, and geography and the theatre. In pursuing this inquiry, I seek to draw on a range of disciplines - including cultural theory, sociology and performance studies, as well as geography - to inform my empirical research. In doing so, I bring the practice of geography into dialogue with a range of academic debates and

¹ As Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of The Oppressed' seeks to do.
theoretical viewpoints which, in probing questions of identity, embodiment and community formation, directly speak to my work.

My aim in this chapter is to explore critically the academic literature that has helped catalyse the topic of 'community theatre' as an appropriate and rich site of enquiry. In this way, I also seek to show where my work is placed within these literatures, and how my research into 'community theatre' aims to build on them. The theoretical review is divided into three main sections. In Part one, I attempt to gain a better understanding of 'community theatre' by tracing its genealogy from fifth century Greece to the community theatre movement of the 1970s. I frame this history within the theories of Growtowski and Brecht, and illustrate how their theories of theatre play a central and influential role in shaping the structure and meaning of 'community theatre'. This historical narrative serves as a backdrop for a subsequent discussion of contemporary work on 'theatre in the community'. Particular emphasis is placed on competing understandings of community theatre, and the significance of 'community' in conceptualising such understandings. Finally, I examine the theatre and performance literature. In particular, I focus on the importance some performance theorists place on distinguishing between 'theatre' and 'performance', and consider the significance of each term in theorising the 'theatre' of community theatre.

Building on the consideration given in Part one to conceptualising theatre in the community, Part two explores the 'community' of community theatre. I begin by briefly outlining what is known about the concept of community, before going on to look at the ways in which geographers have attempted to engage and rethink ideas of community, place and space. This will be followed by Part three, in which I am concerned with the 'cultural geographies of community theatre'. Here, I begin by considering the dialogues through which the arts have been debated in geography. After
making apparent the strengths and weaknesses of work in this area, I go on to look at geographic work on the theatre. In the latter part of this section, I examine how geographers have begun to use the vocabulary of performance to rethink concepts of identity and community more performatively. In the final section, attention is paid to the spatialities of community theatre. In particular, an effort is made to detail the material and imaginative geographies of theatre in the community.

Parts one, two and three signal the way towards a more complex envisioning of the cultural geographies of community theatre. They reveal how theatre in the community was shaped by its history; how it is rooted in the language of theatre and performance studies; how it cannot be detached from the notion of 'community'; and offers important insights for the cultural turn in geography.

Part One - Conceptualising Community Theatre

2.2 The Roots of Community Theatre

In this section, I will review the history of community theatre, from the early twentieth century, to the community theatre movement in the 1970s. I shall take as my example the experience of The Combination\(^2\), and frame it within the theories of Bertold Brecht and Jerzy Growtowski, as well as the influences of fifth century Greece, the medieval morality and mystery plays and Shakespeare's Globe. I shall be referring to an interview I conducted with John Turner - who was artistic director of The Combination in the 1970s and 1980s - in September 2000. I will also be drawing on key texts that engage

\(^2\) I seek to draw on the experience of The Combination in particular, because it is credited as the first professional community theatre company in the UK (see Itzen,1980:320).
with the history of theatre in the community, as well as those that chronicle the origins of theatrical expression more generally. I suggest that the ideas of predecessors have remained a powerful and influential force in subsequent practices of theatre in the community.

The various descriptive and analytical accounts of 'community theatre' (for example, see Itzen, 1980; Craig, 1980; Davies, 1987; and Turner, 1999), link the emergence of the 'community theatre movement' to the mood of disillusionment that characterised Britain during the course of the 1970s. This was a Britain disillusioned by the Labour government of 1964 and 1974, and also by the theatrical establishment's failure to address the diverse society - that is, ethnic minorities, women, gays and lesbians - of its time. For many, the (bourgeois) capitalist social system operated in the theatre system. And there appears to have been a widespread sense of injustice, of inequality and prejudice, which in turn led to increasing social divisions. Turner (1999) in setting this scene reveals, through a vocabulary of rebellion and upheaval, the context in which the foundations of the community theatre movement were laid:

"The miners rose against the Heath Government and Thatcher Government decimated them a decade later. The Cold War and the Nuclear Debate were at their most vitriolic on the unseen edge of their resolution. The black communities of the inner cities were rising almost every summer driven beyond breaking point by racism, unemployment and bad housing, their torches ignited by insensitive policing. The rising consciousness of a woman's political perspective put all these issues and more into a new focus. Northern Ireland was a war zone. South Africa was an outrage. Vietnam was a war zone and as a consequence so were American Embassies the world over. It was a time of Punk, Funk and of sexual independence. A contentious time in which hard lines were drawn" (Turner, 1999: 4).
According to Turner (1999), it is during these straitened times, of funk and sexual independence, that community theatre also made its debut. The significance of this era is also reflected in the work of other authors. Itzen (1980), in her book Stages in Revolution: political theatre in Britain since 1968, theorises community theatre as part of the 'political theatre movement' that she dates from 1968 to 1978. Croyden and Roose-Evans (1974; 1984), discuss theatre in the community within a narrative about 'experimental theatre'. Craig and Dicenzo (1980; 1996), locate the community theatre movement within their projects on 'alternative theatre'; while Davies (1987), conceptualises community theatre within the development of both alternative and experimental theatre. It is important to note that none of these texts have been explicitly concerned with 'community theatre'; but instead locate the practice within part of a much broader analysis of 'political', 'alternative' or 'experimental' theatre. While I applaud the important contribution these texts have made to understandings in the field of 'alternative' theatre - and indeed, the writers for undertaking the less than popular task of discussing peripheral art-forms - few have yet to consider 'community theatre' as a genre in its entirety. In what follows, I attempt to tell the story of the community theatre movement. It is a story firmly attached to luminaries such as Brecht and Growtowski, and with claimed antecedents in the primitive ceremonies of the Greeks. To illustrate this story, I shall use the experience of The Combination and contrast this with a theoretical overview. Conceived in this more expansive way, I will show how the community theatre movement was defined by the moral, political and social environment of its time.

2.2.1 The Combination

The story of The Combination was relayed to me on an afternoon in September 2000, amidst the hustle and bustle of The National Film Theatre's crowded café. In this milieu, John Turner described in some detail how The
Combination came into being, the company's influences, and aims and objectives. It follows that, because the consequent account is being told largely retrospectively by Turner, it has been shaped by his own rationale and judgement. Mindful of this fact, I have attempted to combine Turner's personal experience with a broader theoretical overview.

The Combination was set up in Brighton in 1967, by Jennie Harris (artistic director), Ruth Marks and Noel Craig, who had all been at university together, and who shared the belief that creative work should have a link with the real world. They named themselves - as well as the 'old Victorian schoolhouse' that became their home - 'The Combination', on the principle that "the same name [would] do for company, venue and costume" (Turner, 1999:6). As Turner revealed, this principle largely derived from the 'poor theatre movement' and Jerzy Grotowski's Towards a Poor Theatre (1968). In this book, Grotowski reflects a vision of theatre that is divested of adornment and affectation - the principles of which I shall now briefly map out.

In this conception, Grotowski believes that we can "...accomplish spiritual renewal by unmasking repressed psychic materials" (quoted in Auslander, 1997: 13). His objective was to discover the essential 'core' of theatre, to penetrate its outer shell and thus find true meaning. For Grotowski, the actor's "...passive readiness to realise an active role" (1968:17), would bring him/her and spectator closer towards what he has termed a 'poor theatre'. It is this notion, with its associated meanings of 'modesty' and 'humbleness' that form the basis of Grotowski's early teachings (to be distinguished from his later para theatrical experiments) on theatre. He believed the experience of theatre should be of a therapeutic nature and called his performers 'holy actors', exemplary figures for whom performance was an act of self-sacrifice. It would demand full divestment of personality - "it was all a question of giving one's self" (1968: 38). In this, the actor/actress's self abnegation
becomes a means to an end - that end being the revelation of truth for both actor/actress and spectator:

“...The actor must learn to use his role as if it were a surgeon’s scalpel, to dissect himself. It is not just the question of portraying himself under given circumstances or ‘living’ a part. The important thing is to use the role as a trampoline, an instrument with which to study what is hidden behind our every day mask – the inner most core of our personality - in order to sacrifice it, expose it” (Growtowski, 1968:37).

In Growtowski’s theatre, then, the spectator is also encouraged to explore his/her self through the actor/actress’s careful portrayal of character. Both actor/actress and audience are on the same level. They are invited to arrive at a private truth of self knowledge, and in so doing are able to critically evaluate themselves and work towards a deeper truth.

I have referred to Growtowski’s reflections on theatre, albeit quite briefly, because they are useful in explaining and interpreting the philosophy behind the community theatre movement. They highlight two fundamental points of relevance within the work of The Combination. The first, a simple point, is that the company’s costume was the (very modest) ‘long john’. Secondly, the set that The Combination utilised in performance, was an environmental scaffolding design, which contained both actors/actresses and audience within its multi-levelled framework. In this way, Growtowski’s belief that the actor/actress is on the same level as the audience was extended to three levels of scaffolding boards. Moreover, by seeking to ignite the critical conscience of the spectator, Growtowski can be seen to be developing the kind of theatre The Combination, and as such, the community theatre movement, were set to follow. In fact - and as I shall elaborate shortly the notion of the ‘critical observer’ became an integral feature of The Combination’s practice.
The Combination’s first show was based on Aristophanes’ The Wasps. Turner identified Aristophanes (448-380 BC) - a Greek dramatist known for his expert handling of social satire and buffoonery - as key to The Combination’s approach to theatre. In The Combination’s adaptation of The Wasps, the production was staged in the offices of a modern day job centre:

“In ‘The Wasps’, as adapted to the modern world of unemployment assistance, Mr Dobbs, a senior clerical officer has a birthday. He invites his claimants to share his cake. The audience are included. He realises his cake will not go round every one. He decides to institute some kind of means test to ascertain who is more deserving of a slice of cake. ‘Anyone on a monthly salary’? Have a slice of cake. ‘Anyone a single mother’? Hope you’re on a diet” (Turner, 1999:50).

Just as Aristophanes had poked fun at the gargantuan appetite of the comic character Heracles - the “…snorting, grinding and gulping [of] his food” (Green & Handley, 1995:50) - so The Combination utilised the element of satire to provoke their audiences. True to his bawdy and rumbustious humour, the company’s banter sought to play on the audience’s sensibilities. Yet, The Combination transcends the comedy of Aristophanes, by taking straightforward satire a step further. Thus we see the actor playing Mr Dobbs bombarding the audience with questions that are intended to shock:


This is the shock therapy that achieves Brecht’s ‘Verfrumdungseffekt’ (alienation effect). Since this theorist played an influential role in The Combination’s style of performance, I will now briefly explicate his ideas on theatre.
For Brecht (1898 - 1956), theatre should get closer to the experience of a boxing event, characterised by 'elegance', 'lightness', 'dryness' and 'objectivity'. Empathy for Brecht, seemed only to confuse the public's understanding of the play:

"The Brechtian actor...does not live the role, he demonstrates it" (Martin, 2000: 229).

This, Brecht contrasted with the 'rantings' of the German classical stage, which he felt prevented the spectator from using his/her head. Instead, he argues they are drawn into the plot and made to identify with the characters. The means by which this is achieved, for Brecht, falsify the picture of reality and the audience is too contendedly hypnotised to see that it is false:

...[T]he audience whose souls have crept into that of the hero will see the action entirely from his point of view, and as they are breathlessly following a course of events..., they have neither time or the detachment to sit back and reflect in a truly critical spirit on the social and moral implications of the play" (Esslin, 1965:110).

Brecht's answer is clear: not only must theatre abandon the temptation to create an illusion, it must do its best to destroy in the bud any illusion of reality that will continuously tend to arise. The theatre of illusion is replaced by Brecht's 'Epic Theatre', which, as used by Brecht, is an Aristotelian term for a form of narrative which is 'not tied to time'. Although the latter explains the origin of the term epic, Brecht's theory soon moved far past this. Now, not only did it exclude the idea of entertainment, but also ruled out the traditional concepts of 'catharsis' and 'empathy'. Brecht saw the Aristotelian theory of catharsis or purging of the emotions by self-identification (empathy), as an essential part of the hypnotic, anti-critical theatre that he was opposed to.
The new epic methods of the 1920s became a means of breaking the spell, of jerking the spectator out of his/her torpor and making him/her make use of his/her critical sense. Hence, Brecht in his Marxist period, tried to introduce a number of devices designed to 'literize' the theatre. Songs, slogans, non-representational décor and other inhibiting devices are presented as a deliberate means of interrupting the play. The actor must use quite different means to draw attention to events that had previously been announced. For Brecht believed the actor's business is not to 'express feelings' but to show attitude or 'Gesten'. Moreover, the audience must be discouraged from losing its critical detachment by identification with one or more of the characters. They should be kept apart - strange, 'alien'. The 'alienation effect', however, is not merely the breaking of the illusion; it is instead a matter of detachment, of reorientation.

Applied to the performances of The Combination, the alienation effect became a further means of inciting their audience, interrupting play and breaking any illusion. They saw themselves as popular entertainers - "...as actors, magicians, dancers, comedians, puppeteers..."(Turner, 1999:6) - reliant on good old fashioned routines and familiar traditions. Traditions that audiences would enjoy because they would feel at home with them (see Green & Handley, 1995:49). Like the medieval morality and mystery plays, the company were "...far more deeply concerned with argument and debate than with narrative or the portrayal of character" (Wickham, 1987:106). The difference is merely that in the medieval morality and mystery plays, the sole purpose is didactic. The source of their message was immaterial, for what mattered was the instructional character of delivery. The impulse behind The Combination's work was less didactic than comic, and the means by which they expressed this was largely instinctive, unintended. It was a theatre of situation rather than a theatre of illusion:
"There was much store set by our art being a continuing process of creativity rather than the art as a product as served up by established institutions" (Turner, 1999:5).

The Combination's creative strength was harnessed in 'group improvisation'. Motivation came from the belief that theatre, and as such "...audience, site or venue, material and actors, can be put to the services of society in ways that can be socially developmental, and still get laughs" (Turner, 1999: 12). This is the experience Turner (1999), expresses in the company's adaptation of The Wasps which, like the theatre of Brecht and Shakespeare, contained lyrical inserts in the form of blues songs, and saw performers dancing around and chanting:

"We are the men from the D.H.S.S and we have come to relieve distress" (Turner, 1999: 7).

In modest costume and armed with their scaffolding set - both echoing Growtowski - The Combination toured to theatres, art centres, repertory and the West End. With the money they secured from touring theatre venues, they were able to finance visits to the local claimants union. Turner (1999:7) recalls, how on one visit "...we danced in one door of the offices around the benches of the claimants and out again before the police arrived". Like Brecht, then - and his acknowledgement that the basis of his theatre was to unite the two traditions of the bourgeois revolt, the reformist and the aesthetic - the company were intent on making the theatrical experience both didactic and entertaining. This was the aim of The Combination and it determines its form, which had to, out of necessity, represent a convention of the stage basically different from realistic theatre.

Furthermore, the company "...worked on the basis that if established theatre had become irrelevant to the mass of the population, only a brand new
theatre would have the remotest hope of retrieving a solution" (Turner, 1999: 7) - one that would not compete with television. The Combination's ideas for a new popular theatre then, would thus extend to include new audiences. One substantial difficulty, however, was finding the ingredient, a potent form of theatre capable of reaching them. For The Combination, and the community theatre movement that would follow, the key ingredient became participation - a process of learning rather than one way teaching. It would, as in the theatres of Brecht and Growtowski, rely on the 'informed' audience who, "...because they shared the experience of the subject of the play could participate in an intellectual way..." (Turner, 1999:8). This is the element The Combination has tried to make the core of its practice. By the 1970s, the notion of participation would become a fully established objective of the community theatre movement.

Yet, if the inclusion of the 'informed observer' brings The Combination - and as such the community theatre movement - close both in spirit and in theory to the teachings of Brecht and Growtowski, it is necessary to recall that the idea of participation - and the related notions of inclusion, access and involvement - serves to associate the company just as closely with the popular theatre of Shakespeare. As Turner explained to me in interview:

"We call it community theatre because he’s [Shakespeare’s] got cheap rates for his groundlings who stand up all the time no matter the weather".3

Turner went on to explain why he felt Shakespeare's Globe displayed the chief tenets of community theatre: namely, it was accessible, it contained a cross-section of social classes, and there was close contact between actor/actress and audience. Further more, and following Gurr (1992: 222)

"...at the Globe the spectators surrounding the stage were in the cheapest places". It is this onus on accessibility, on inclusiveness, that The Combination has placed at the centre of their endeavour to make theatre more popular.

There had, however, already been signs of theatre returning to embrace its popular roots in the 1930s. In America this was seen in the activities of unemployed actors who, backed by the Federal Theatre Project, performed around the "...dust bowl communities of ruined farmers, shanty towns, breadlines and soup kitchens" (Turner, 1999:11). They called their show Living Newspaper, the content of which, as Barker (1992), has pointed out, ironically served to criticise the capitalist system and government for creating the unemployment in the first place. Out of this trend came The Group Theatre New York, which Turner (1999), cites as producing dramas out of the contemporary crisis. In Britain, change is personified by The Worker's Theatre Movement. The latter movement also proved particularly successful in the 1930s, presenting agit-prop that was specific to local situations:

"...the Becontree Rent Strike where the issues were tight and the course of action clear - 'Withhold Your Rent'..." (Barker, 1992:31).

Yet, as Turner (1999), articulates, because of the 'self obsessed' nature of the time, any implicit or explicit message of The Worker's Theatre Movement would have been missed. The 1960s finds Joan Littlewood accepting the challenge to return theatre to a 'critically' popular arena. Her play, Oh What A Lovely War!, has been referred to as an example of a successful Brechtian production, incorporating music, film, comedy and short sketches, in order to illustrate the carnage and 'ultimate senselessness' of the First World War. Turner (1999), has credited Oh What A Lovely War! as being the blueprint for community theatre. For him, however, "...the play didn't come up with any radical new source of research. It merely created a show out of the public
and the popular arena" (Turner, 1999: 19). For The Combination, the notion of fusing theatre and society back into a 'meaningful whole', had to be followed literally. Audience was paramount. To "...ignore ...[them] and present theatre as a kind of fait accompli with a take-it-or leave-it attitude, was to produce dead art" (Turner, 1999:13).

Up until 1970/71, however, the company had themselves been attracting the attentions of Brighton's particularly 'cliquey' student audience. They decided that they would have to go on tour. With the money obtained from touring art centres, the company found that they could go to different venues - i.e., youth clubs, schools and community centres - and thus develop new audiences. Despite the success of these tours, the focus of the company was set to change:

"Then we decided if we really wanted to be serious about a community...[we] would have get out of the van and live where normal people lived. We had to stop the tour. Get off the bus!" (Turner, 1999:16).

In 1973, The Combination opened as the first community theatre company, at the 'Albany' in Deptford. Turner notes other community theatre companies that were around at this time. For example, Broadside Mobile Workers Theatre, who played to building workers; Cast (the Cartoon Archetypal Slogan Theatre) and Red Ladder, who addressed working class audiences; and the Half Moon, which aimed to create a popular theatre that combined new works and classics. In terms of The Combination, the local community of Deptford, was to be a central determining force, both in performance and in the content of the productions more generally:

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4 Also at this time, The Association of Community Theatre (TACT) - an active pressure group - was formed to campaign on the behalf of community theatre workers.
“...the Combination describes themselves as ‘Deptford’s Entertainers’. The limits of this stance only dawned on them slowly as they absorbed the lessons they learned from the social workers and transferred them to their approach to their theatre” (Turner, 1999:21).

As time went by, it became increasingly obvious that there was a distinction between the practise of community theatre, and the ethos of community that underlined it. There was the problem of finding the ‘right play’ that would appeal to audiences. And once found the company did not want to repeat themselves - did not want to get ‘predictable’. This process of adjustment in Deptford, was heightened by further hostilities toward black families who had been recently located in the historically white, working class area. The Combination were going to create an ‘island of multi-cultural harmony’ in the divided streets:

“After our show and its live band and disco every night one audience would leave and another Afro Caribbean audience would enter for the all night reggae sound system of Jah Shake. Combination actors would serve behind the bar” (Turner, 1999: 23).

Significantly, until this point, The Combination actors and actresses had all been ‘White’. Now the company would become multiracial with the addition of actress/singer Debbie Bishop and actor Steve Jacobs.

The Albany - under the direction of The Combination - was a musical theatre attuned to the belief that music, as a proven popular genre, was also capable of transcending cultural boundaries. Yet, the venue was not exclusively a theatre. When The Combination was not staging shows, its doors swung upon to the likes of Jimmy Jones, Charlie Smithers and Max Wall, famous comedians of the Old Kent Road. Offering rock concerts, jumble sales, pottery workshops, video and film projects, mural painting etc, The Combination were able to stimulate audiences through their transformation into a
multimedia company. These developments were to the credit of The Combination’s flexible and agile character. Originally set up to encompass ‘Deptford’s Entertainers’, the Albany had become a venue that provided the basis for much broader cultural exchanges. Ironically, one single event would confirm just how successful they had become. Perhaps because of the success The Combination was having in promoting intercultural understanding and dialogue within the local community, the Albany was burnt down:

“In 1978 we were fire bombed by the far right...As of that moment I was artistic director of ashes” (Turner, 1999: 26).

The Albany was rebuilt after it had been burnt down in the summer of 1978. They went on to produce “...satellite workshop projects for teenagers, for young girls, young musicians, black dancers...” (Turner, 1999: 32). What made this activity possible, was the company’s adaptability and strong sense of the measures that would have to be taken to fully integrate themselves into society.

This historical narrative has been useful in two main respects. First, it provides evidence of how The Combination developed out of various theories, traditions and movements. Second, it acts as a barometer for assessing whether parallels can be drawn between contemporary practices of community theatre (which I explore in chapter four), and the earlier community theatre movement. The discussion which follows goes some way in ascertaining the significance of past approaches to theatre in the community, as I look at contemporary work that has explored ‘community theatre’. The kinds of enquiry we can draw upon are relatively few, a reflection of the paucity of material on ‘community theatre’. There are two books that I have come across, which can be said to deal with contemporary practices of community theatre; the first is Steven Gooch’s Altogether Now: An
Alternative View of Theatre and Community (1984). The second is Eugene van Erven's Community Theatre: Global Perspectives (2001). My intention is to present a short summary of each book as they have both informed my own theoretical understanding of community theatre.

2.2.2 Contemporary Readings of Theatre in the Community

To begin with, I draw on Steven Gooch's Altogether Now: An Alternative View of Theatre and Community (1984). From a starting point sympathetic to the political theatre movement of 1968, Gooch examines the relationship between theatre - that is, established and 'fringe' theatre - and community. For Gooch, the idea of theatre relating to, or being part of the community, is 'neither new or strange', and he cites, amongst other theatre traditions, 'the dances and ceremonies of primitive societies' as also being centred in the community. Gooch conceptualises 'community theatre' - a term he asserts implies the attempt to bring 'artefact and community together' - as being 'multiple' and 'varied'. In this, he identifies a range of companies with working rationales and artistic practices that span an array of potential meanings of 'community'. Community, in the discourse of community theatre, refers to 'a group of people with shared values'. The basis of such values can be 'place' or 'geography', as with theatre companies that are based in a particular locality. However, community can also be defined by common 'social' or 'political' concerns - as with 'gay' or 'feminist' theatre - or by a sharing of 'cultural preference', for example 'Black', 'Asian' or 'Irish' theatre.

Gooch's critical point is that the meaning of community theatre cannot be easily defined. In fact, for Gooch, it is unhelpful to attempt to offer any kind of absolute or exact definition of what theatre in the community is. Instead, he suggests that it is more useful to consider community theatre "...[as] ...a model... of how the whole of theatre could be brought to relate to the whole
community and the general social framework within which theatre takes place" (1984: 58). I find this approach to understanding community theatre useful, because, whilst being expansive, it provides an important route to understanding what the project of community theatre could be. Two further points seem especially useful to a study of community theatre. First, Gooch alludes to the inherent problems associated with theatre projects that are based in the community. It is argued that, for example, actors/theatre workers are seen as 'fly-by-night people', with no real concern for respective communities; audiences identify with the actors rather than community participants involved in shows; and finding the right sort of plays with casts that fit the community is highly unlikely. Thus, Gooch contends: "It is one thing to imagine functioning as a valuable and integral part of a local community, it is quite another thing for that to be put into practice" (1984: 61, original emphasis). Second, it is relevant to note Gooch's recommendations for the realisation of a more 'community-conscious' theatre:

"The trap of reproducing ...another minority culture, or remaining 'ghettoised', can only be overcome if the size of the performing venues is increased to the point where maximum audience potential can be realised. The trap of a narrow aesthetic vision can only be overcome if companies can afford to employ larger casts and expand production costs... The trap of good productions disappearing before they maximise their audience, of good scripts not receiving second and third productions in other parts of the country, of a lack of liaison between practitioners and audiences, can only be overcome by doubling the number of those at present engaged in arts administration and deploying their energies away from vetting of arts initiatives towards the implementation of them" (1984: 59).

Eugene van Erven, in Community Theatre: Global Perspectives (2001), has made similar observations. In this, his inter-continental study of community theatre - in The Philippines, The Netherlands, Los Angeles, Costa Rica, Kenya and Australia - yields information about the diverse mechanics of theatre in the community, the organisational strategies of its companies, and the ethical
concerns involved in particular projects. For van Erven, community theatre is a 'world wide phenomenon' that manifests itself in a variety of ways. Unlike Gooch, however, van Erven maintains that its practice is united by an emphasis on local/personal stories, which are first processed through improvisation, and are then 'collectively shaped' (by professional and community artists) into theatre - which often occurs outside theatre buildings. By focussing attention on the creative process in each of the six countries, van Erven is able to illustrate the ways in which a 'local cohesion is enhanced', and a 'respect for otherness increased'. Van Erven thus suggests that community theatre artists need to be flexible and possess the skill and patience to create original performances through improvisation. His work also raises the question of how much artistic satisfaction professionals and participants alike can derive from community theatre, given that its material and aesthetic forms emerge - almost exclusively - from the community.

The work of Gooch and van Erven provides a conceptual understanding of community theatre which can be used with some profit in my project on theatre in the community. Both works illuminate the varied nature of community, yet they merely hint at how the 'theatre' of community theatre might be theorised. I want now to examine the theatre and performance literature so that I may further apprehend the 'theatre' of community theatre.

2.2.3 Theatre and Performance: Representation v Presentation

One of the central concerns of the discourse on theatre is the nature of the relationships between theatre and performance. The idea of 'theatre' - which has been theorised as pertaining to permanent buildings created specifically to house dramatic performance (Shiach, 1987:3); hegemonic spaces constructed according to hierarchical principles (see Williams, 1954; and Holderness, 1992:12); and enabling mechanisms of cultural production
(Kershaw, 1999:49-56); - has fallen into intellectual disrepute. 'Performance', on the other hand - which refers to spontaneous action and the playing of a role (Shiach, 1987); social or communicative processes which require audiences for the conveyance and interpretation of meaning (Frith, 1996:205); and cultural presentations that have recognisable theatrical components (Kershaw, 1999:15) - has emerged as a key site in which the cultural, the social and the political are centred. It follows that theatre scholars and historians have increasingly set ‘performance’ in a relationship of antagonistic opposition to ‘theatre’, and have ascribed to performance a new, potent socio-political function.

My aim in this section - while examining the conceptual usefulness of the terms ‘theatre’ and ‘performance’ in relation to community theatre - is to explore the tension between arguments which position theatre as a genre exclusively concerned with representation, and those that see performance as a practice concerned with presentation.

Writings in performance and theatre studies have conceptualised ‘theatre’ as a ‘diminishing’ genre:

“The fact is that theatre as we have known and practised it - the staging of written dramas - will be the string quartet of the twenty-first century: a beloved but extremely limited genre, a subdivision of performance” (Schechner, 1992, quoted in Kershaw, 1999:14).

The metaphorical use of theatre employed here - the ‘string-quartet of the twenty-first century’, the ‘subdivision of performance’ - marks theatre as an outdated concept, a limited category existing as a subsidiary of performance. Schechner’s comments reflect a growing concern amongst theatre critics and scholars, to establish a separatedness from theatre. To understand why this may be - and indeed the implications of this to community theatre - we must
firstly determine what 'theatre' is. If we return to the theorisations of theatre posed in the introduction to this section, we will see that theatre can refer to permanent buildings that house dramatic performance; hegemonic spaces constructed according to hierarchical principles; and enabling systems of cultural production. I shall now, briefly consider each criterion for determining 'theatre'.

Theatre: Permanent buildings that house dramatic performance. If by 'theatre', we are referring to 'dramatic performance that takes place in a building called theatre', then it must be accepted that this definition would largely exclude 'theatre in the community'. This is because I have learnt that most community theatre performances occur outside of theatre buildings. It also follows, then, that 'theatre' in this instance, probably refers to a minority cultural form (Holderness, 1992). The dramatic performances that take place in theatre, as Schechner points out, are based on 'written dramas' - that is, 'text'. Narrative in theatre is thus significant. It is the means by which the actors/actresses on stage convey a particular story and act out the theatrical illusion. Audiences, drawn into the illusion, endow the actors/actresses with magical powers and elevate them to the status of omnipotent beings.

Theatre: Hegemonic spaces constructed according to hierarchical principles. This definition refers to theatre as a (powerful) institutional organisation that is shaped and constructed by hierarchical principles. Theatre production is modelled on a hierarchical structure: a producer commissions the writer/director, the director in turn commissions a designer or musical director, and so on. There are further distinctions in seating and in pricing of tickets (see Schechner, 1988; and Kershaw, 1999), and between the audience and the actors/actresses.
Theatre: Enabling systems of cultural production. This definition theorises theatre as a ‘service industry’. As a ‘service’, theatre provides ‘cultural entertainment’ in the form of scripted dramas that are performed by actors/actresses, to an audience of onlookers. As a minority cultural form, those receiving this service will be a privileged few, individuals with enough ‘cultural capital’ to appreciate it (Bourdieu, 1993).

To summarise, then, ‘theatre’ happens in permanent buildings, which are characterised by ‘text-based’ performances and hierarchical structures. ‘Theatre-going’ can be an exclusive lifestyle for the privileged and for many, it is a unique shared experience between performers and audiences. From this perspective, it is possible to understand how ‘theatre’ has come to be described as a ‘limited genre’. Certainly, in terms of ‘theatre in the community’, this conception of ‘theatre’ fails to capture the different performing spaces, performance styles, stage conventions, audiences, or, for that matter the democratic ethics that characterise its practice. Indeed, for this, and in terms of a genre that is capable of engaging with the social, cultural and political issues of contemporary society, many theatre scholars and practitioners point to ‘performance’.

Following Diamond (1996:3): “Performance... has been honoured with dismantling textual authority, illusionism, and the canonical actor in favour of the polymorphous body of the performer. Refusing the conventions of role playing, the performer presents herself/himself as a sexual, permeable, tactile body, scourging audience narrativity along with the barrier between stage and spectator”. While this interpretation of ‘performance’ does not encompass all that ‘performance’ is, a great deal of what is said to constitute community theatre - i.e., performance that occurs away from theatre buildings, is not explicitly concerned with ‘text’, and challenges distinctions between performers and spectators, etc - is encompassed in this description.
To appreciate this more fully, and to understand why 'theatre' is commonly theorised as performance’s ‘other’, it is useful to go back to the definitions of performance suggested at the start of this section.

Performance: Spontaneous Action and the Playing of a Role. In Don Shiach’s writings about performance (1987), ‘spontaneous action and the playing of a role’ refers to what the performer does ‘on stage’ - the improvisational means by which he/she ‘executes’ or ‘performs’ his/her role/character/part to an audience. Other commentators, however (for example, Turner, 1982; and Schechner, 1993;), have recognised that the ‘playing of roles’ also occurs ‘off stage’ in every day interactions. This is the ‘performance of everyday life’, which, according to Thrift (2000a: 577) pertains to the ‘day-to-day’ improvisations which produce the ‘now’. Such improvisations are performed ‘at work’ and ‘at play’, and arise from the ‘expressive powers’ of the body.

Performance: Social or Communicative Processes which Require Audiences for the Conveyance and Interpretation of Meaning. In exclusively referring to the genre of ‘performance art’, this notion of performance pertains to the embodied actions of the performer, whose ‘living’, ‘working’ body reiterates values, reaffirms community and constructs/reconstructs social identity. However, as Frith (1996: 205 - 206) argues, because it is the actions, movements and vocal gestures of the performer - which appear as natural, impulsive and unforced gestures - which convey meaning, such performance is dependent on the interpretative abilities of audiences. This has certain implications, which shall be elaborated in the summary of ‘performance’ shortly.

Performance: Cultural presentations that have recognisable theatrical components. In Kershaw’s (1999) theorisations about theatre and performance, he uses ‘performance’ to refer to ‘cultural presentations that have recognisable theatrical components’. In this, he writes about ‘framing devices’, which
direct audiences to the 'constructed' nature of what is being staged and the social, cultural, political and philosophical premises through which this 'constructedness' is achieved.

Whilst, then, 'performance' can be seen as a way of working with 'text' - as was highlighted in Shiach's descriptions - what seems to come through in the above definitions, is the 'non-representational' elements of performance. 'Performance', as Thrift (2000a: 577) has argued, is the "art of producing the now". It is, as Diamond (1996:1) instructs, "...always a doing and a thing done...[describing] certain embodied acts in specific sites...[and] the completed event framed in time and space and remembered...". Performance has also been extolled as a site in which identities are constructed through complex relations of power (Butler, 1990), and with having the ability to cross boundaries of gender, class and race (Case, 1988). Underlying such comments is the assumed 'limitlessness' of performance - which is contrasted with theatre's 'limitedness' - and as such, performance's primacy over 'theatre'. I would argue, however, that divides between 'theatre' and 'performance' are not so easily drawn and further, that performance can be subject to the same limitations as theatre.

To illustrate this point, I return to the theorisation of 'performance' as 'social or communicative processes which require audiences for the conveyance of meaning'. This definition of performance privileges the 'polymorphous' and 'tactile' body of the performer, and in so doing, challenges the constraints associated with theatre - i.e., textual authority, illusionism and the autonomous, omnipotent actor/actress, etc. Such a challenge - the success of which is signalled in Elinor Fuch's 'The Death of Character' (1996), which explores the movement away from 'character' and 'narrative' toward the 'performance persona' - is seen as productive, because it broadens possibilities for an equal and less restrictive experience of 'theatre'. I would argue, however,
that 'performance', in this sense is in itself constraining. The abandonment of 'text' and 'character' does not necessarily allow for a more direct or democratic experience of 'theatre', and the successful 'translation' of the performer's movements, actions, gestures, etc, depends upon the interpretative skills of a very particular kind of audience - those with 'cultural capital'. Whilst, then, performance is said to engage with the socio-political domain in more telling ways than theatre, performance fails to fully transgress the barriers to an inclusive and accessible 'theatre' experience.

Some commentators, in a similar vein, have wondered whether 'theatre' can be detached from 'performance', and have been reluctant to divide the genres into two distinct categories. Philip Auslander, in From Acting to Performance (1997) for example, sees the relationship of theatre and performance as being one of 'continuity' rather than rupture, and also stresses (see Auslander, 1999) performance and theatre's ability to create 'community' amongst audiences and between performers and spectators. And Elin Diamond (1996:4) identifies some of the basic questions emerging from the study of theatre that are also fundamental to the study of performance:

"[P]owerful questions posed by theater representation - questions of subjectivity (who is speaking/acting), location (in what sites/spaces?), audience (who is watching?), commodification (who is in control?), conventionality (how are meanings produced?), politics (what ideological or social positions are being reinforced or contested?) - are embedded in the bodies and acts of performers".

As part of the strategy for examining the conceptual usefulness of 'theatre' and 'performance' in relation to community theatre, I have been foregrounding how the critical conflation of theatre with representation and limitation, and performance's attachment to presentation and limitlessness, allows us to more adequately conceptualise theatre in the community. Theatre's alignment with permanent theatre buildings, narrative, illusionism,
hierarchy, etc - whilst, as we shall see, is characteristic of some community theatres - is somewhat constraining for theatre in the community. And performance’s transcendence of the constraints associated with theatre - whilst not wholly accurate - has been especially influential in conceptually understanding community theatre as a form of cultural performance that engages with issues of social, cultural and political significance. Debates about the significance of theatre and performance are thus crucial to understanding the specificity and form of theatre in the community.

In conclusion to Part one, I have shown, by tracing the genealogies of theatre in the community, how the ethos of community theatre - the desire to be responsive and responsible to the communities it serves - has been present earlier, in varying degrees and forms and in different movements. Contemporary practices of community theatre would seem less radical than that of the earlier community theatre movement. And although participation has remained a key and almost necessary component of community performance, modern day companies represent themselves in a variety of ways, using a range of competing definitions of ‘community’. Debates about theatre and performance have helped to theorise community theatre more adequately. I now turn to an exploration of conceptions of community to better understand the ‘community’ of ‘community theatre’.

Part Two - The ‘Community’ of Community Theatre

The notion of ‘community’ is central to the project of community theatre. As Gooch (1984) and van Ervan (2001) have argued, the diverse practices of community theatre aim to provide social, cultural, ethnic, or otherwise peripheral communities with opportunities to collectively participate in artistic events. Baz Kershaw (1992: 60) has also suggested an equivalent and simultaneous aim of community theatre is to “…empower people through
encouraging the continuous regeneration of the spirit of community'' (emphasis added). 'Community', however, is an ambiguous concept in which ideas of contestation uneasily compete with romantic visions of harmony. In Part two, I examine the literature on 'community' with a view to gaining a better understanding of community theatre. This field of work is diverse. What I want to draw from it is arguments that position community as a site of contestation and harmony. My way forward will be to examine sociological conceptions of community, before going on to consider the reworking of ideas of community in geography. I conclude by exploring the utilisation of community in public policy. I do so to highlight the implications of this (largely ideological) usage for the practices of community theatre companies.

2.3 Community: A Site of Contestation and Harmony

2.3.1 The Concept of Community

"When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning..." (Baudrillard 1983: 12-13).

Jean Baudrillard is writing about the processes of simulation in late capitalism, of mass-produced, mediated images which, he argues, have banished the 'real' by representing their own simulated reality. In this section, I will explain how Baudrillard's allusions to nostalgia and its transcendence of the real are also central in sociological debates about community. Concepts of community have a long and potent lineage in sociology. In the British context, in a period of rapid urbanisation, the meaning of community emerged out of concern, an 'obsession', with the ways in which industrialisation and urbanisation were transforming social relationships. Subsequently, many sociologists developed typologies to illustrate the differences between types of society, and theories to explain processes of change. This has led to a
range of definitions and models, which some critics (for example, Bell & Newby: 1974) assert, further provoke contradictory understandings of what 'community' means. Running through most studies, however, is the disingenuous claim that community equals the 'Good Life'. In fact, "... most definitions of community reflect not so much what community is but what it should be" (Bell & Newby 1974:3). Not surprisingly, many erroneous and conflicting ideas about community have grown up. Much of this confusion derives from the use of it made by Ferdinand Tönnies in Gemeinschaft und Gesellschaft (1887).

In this book, Tönnies seeks to trace the process of urbanisation and its effects upon rural and urban dwellers, and in so doing developed a typological usage of community. He used an ideal type based on Gemeinschaft (community) and Gesellschaft (association), and stated that the trend in human history was a movement from community to association. In Tönnies' conception of Gemeinschaft - as with Baudrillard's postmodern society of simulacra - the longing for an ideal world is transmuted into that of a harmonious past. A past in which individuals are united by common norms of behaviour which have arisen through the sharing of traditional values:

"All intimate, private and exclusive living together, so we discover, is life in Gemeinschaft (community)... It is the lasting and genuine form of living together" (Tönnies, quoted in Bell & Newby, 1974: 8).

The general character of this 'genuine form of living' takes place in the rural village:

"The proximity of dwellings, the communal fields and even the mere contiguity of holdings necessitate many contacts of human beings and cause inurement to an intimate knowledge of one another" (Tönnies, quoted in Bell & Newby, 1974: 9 ).
Tönnies reinforces a romantic and sentimentalised vision of community through references to village life and idyllic experiences. He describes individuals as having 'common fates' and 'spiritual bonds' - criteria which results in a strong sense of territoriality, and a sentimental attachment to a beloved place. *Gesellschaft*, on the other hand, refers to the impersonal and contractual world of association. Relationships are described as transitory and superficial, and achievement is based on status. For Tönnies, those involved in *Gesellschaft* "... strive for that which is to his own advantage and he affirms the actions of others only in so far as and as long as they can further his interest" (Tönnies, quoted in Bell & Newby, 1974: 11). Relations in *Gesellschaft* are based upon material desires, and behind every good deed there lies (a subtle or unsubtle) expectation:

"... it is evident that the relations with visible, material matters take preference, and that mere activities and words form the foundation only in an unreal way" (Tönnies, quoted in Bell & Newby, 1974:12).

Following Tönnies' reasoning, it may be argued that the project of (community) theatre is to restore - to the alienated and materialistic 'Gesellschaft dweller' - communal harmony. Yet critically, Tönnies' conceptualisation of the 'Gemeinschaftlich' way of life also highlights a sphere of tension between the past and the present; tradition and innovation; conservation and renewal. These are tensions that would not seem compatible with Gooch's (1984) more expansive definition of theatre in the community, or indeed van Ervan's (2001) references to 'community' being about the sensitive negotiation of difference.

Within the realm of sociology, use of the term community has remained, to some extent, synonymous with Tönnies' nostalgic yearnings for a distant past. Wirth (1938) for example, argued that historically, community has been an
expression that emphasised the unity of common life between human kind. He views the loss of community as resulting from the rapid growth of urbanisation, which introduced qualitatively new forms of social existence. For Wirth, these new forms of urban life have many negative qualities, which can be contrasted with the more positive features of rural life. Later, Frankenberg (1966) argued that while urban areas may lack the positive features their rural counterparts possess, they may have their own positive characteristics which are absent from rural areas. Frankenberg concludes his analysis with a typology based on the fundamental differences between urban and rural areas. Some of these include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rural</th>
<th>Urban (less rural)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Community</td>
<td>Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple role relationships</td>
<td>Overlapping role relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simple economy</td>
<td>Diverse economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organic solidarity</td>
<td>Mechanical solidarity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Close-knit networks</td>
<td>Loose-knit networks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Fig. 2.1** A Table of the Differences Between ‘Urban’ and ‘Rural’ areas (taken from Frankenberg, 1966)

Like Wirth, however, Frankenberg's study has been criticized (see, for example Pahl, 1970), for facilitating the development of an anti-urban mentality. At the same time, sociologists (Stacey, 1960; Elias & Scotsman, 1974) have made considerable efforts to disentangle this sentiment from their studies. Writing about the county town of Newbury in the 1950s, Stacey (1960) reported that "a mixture of classes within a street or neighbourhood appears to reduce the frequency and intensity of neighbourly contact and support" (Stacey, quoted in Willmott, 1986:93).

The community studies outlined above (with the exception of Stacey, 1960; Elias & Scotsman, 1974), reflect a romantic and essentialised idea of community. However, it is an idea of community that sociologists (Bell &
Newby, 1974; Jewson, 1989) have gone on to find problematic. They argue that the term fulfils a largely ideological function, and refers to what people believe did and should exist, rather than what actually does. In the next section, I will explore the ways in which geographers have moved beyond sentimental fixings and grounding of essentialised community, to engage with notions of community that are more 'progressive' and 'dynamic'.

2.3.2 Cultural Geography and the Reworking of Ideas of Community

In this section, I draw upon the reworking of ideas of community suggested by Massey (1994;1995) and other geographers within the field of spatial-cultural discourse. I examine these theorisations because they move away from essentialised notions of community to an understanding of community as a site in which 'difference' is negotiated and contested. In this way, I move closer to an understanding of the significance of 'community' in the elaboration and diffusion of conceptions of community theatre. As we have seen in section 2.3.1, previous conceptions of community have displayed a powerful sense of nostalgia for the past. They have also expressed a sense of 'rupture' and 'discontinuity', of 'crisis' and 'generational conflict'. Most important for the present discussion, though, they clearly repudiate 'difference', 'multiplicity' and 'pluralism' within collectivities.

Massey (1994) has criticised romantic and essentialised ideas of community, for the stagnant and defensive notions of place they are said to invoke. She argues against notions of communities as 'seamless' and 'timeless' which, she asserts, work to reinforce boundaries that exclude 'others'. It is in this sense that Sibley (1995:43) has also contended: "...[boundaries] articulate beliefs about belonging and not belonging, about the sanctity of territory and the fear of transgression". Massey, in her conceptualisation of a 'global sense of place' (1994), reworks what she has termed 'static' and 'defensive' notions of
place-based community, to picture them as part of a globalised network of 'cultural flows' and 'connections:

"Each geographical 'place' in the world is being realigned in relation to the new global realities, their roles within the wider world are being reassigned, their boundaries dissolved as they are increasingly crossed by everything from investment flows, to cultural inflows, to satellite TV networks" (Massey, 1994:161).

Using Massey's analysis, it is possible to redefine the 'community' in community theatre, not as bounded, but as part of a globalised web of connections through which the 'local' and the 'global' are connected. Such constructions of community might be compared with Stuart Hall's anti-essential evaluations of 'new ethnicities' (1992). In his critique of 'integral' and 'unified' identity, Hall moves away from romanticised conceptions of collectives, to suggest how community may be forged across difference. Elsewhere, but in a similar vein, Massey (1995:59) argues that, instead of thinking about places as areas with boundaries around them; as single entities; as 'community' or places of heritage - we need to think of them as meeting places. As "...articulated movements in networks of social relations and understandings...".

Young (1995:83) has envisioned an 'unoppressive city' - a place in which difference is accepted, "...a city without walls". Similarly, Robins (1991:17) reflects on an ideal, which would be "... to match community and security with the kind of openness that can stimulate a positive sense of challenge and contestation". Amin (2002) agrees with Robins, arguing for everyday, 'prosiac' sites in which people can negotiate and contest difference. Sibley (1995:29), in exploring the realms of exclusion asserts: "[E]ngaging with the other ... might lead to understanding, a rejection of stereotype and a lesser concern with threats to the boundaries of community".
In this brief section, we have seen how geographers - in emphasising that essentialised notions of community are unhelpful - have sought to rethink an adequately 'progressive' sense of the spatial construction of identities. They have demonstrated the importance of looking at community, not as a 'static', 'bounded' or 'homogenised' entity, but as a dynamic process in which difference is articulated, contested and challenged. Essential conceptions are thus abandoned in the move towards more pragmatic conceptualisations of community. In the section that follows, I suggest that the 'abandonment' of traditional community, whilst apparent within the confines of academia, has not been so readily observed in practice. In illustrating this point, I refer to the way in which land use planners have utilised 'utopian' and 'ideal' notions of community to bolster policy objectives. I do so with the aim of thinking about what conception(s) of community - harmonious, contested or both - motivate community theatre's use in practice.

2.3.3 Harmonious or Contested: The 'Community' of Community Theatre?

In an article entitled Planning, Sustainability and The Chimera of Community (1994), Bob Evans argues that planners and architects frequently invoke traditional notions of community in justification of, or as a major objective of policy. Arguing that there has been a reluctance on the part of those in policy to engage with sociological writings on 'community', Evans alerts us to attempts within planning to create 'socially balanced' or 'socially mixed' communities, which are "...envisaged as a microcosm of society as a whole"(Evans, 1994: 108). According to the beliefs that underpin such schemes, 'socially balanced' communities work to produce social cohesion and cultural exchange. Yet as Evans (see also Amin, 2000) contends:

"There is no evidence to suggest that propinquity generates significant social interaction between different social groups or classes. On the contrary, the typical response to such circumstances
is often conflict, social closure and 'encapsulation' (Evans, 1994:108; original emphasis).

For Evans, not only is planning's 'fixation' with an organic notion of community 'misplaced', but he insists that the creation of community 'cannot' and 'should not' be the object of public policy. The grounds on which Evans wants to eliminate policy usages of community - i.e., because they display an 'obliviousness' to academic writings on community, and because the creation of 'socially balanced' communities is not realistic and should not be seen as a desirable goal - would seem fair. Yet while such usages reinforce utopian and 'chimeric' notions of community, they also provide insights into what conceptions of community motivate community theatre's practice. Do, for example, community theatre companies subscribe to an idea of community that is progressive and heterogeneous, or have they - like many planners and architects - been seduced by the rhetoric of an organic or unified notion of community?

According to Gooch and van Ervan (see section 2.2.2 - "Contemporary Readings of Theatre in the Community") the 'community' of community theatre is 'multiple' and 'varied'. In this, Gooch identifies a range of usages of 'community' that underpin a variety of approaches to community theatre. One of Gooch's interests in exploring the diversity of 'community' is to argue for a more expansive definition of community theatre, one that encompasses the range of creative methods and working rationales that characterize its practice. Van Ervan extends Gooch's theorisations on theatre in the community by showing how the 'community' of community theatre is both dynamic and developmental in character. He refers to 'community' as the working out of 'multiple differences' that exist within and between community participants. Such 'differences', according to van Ervan, are negotiated through 'collective art processes', which further enhance cross-cultural understanding. Both Gooch and van Ervan's work, then, clearly posits
'community' as a multiple and varied construct that allows difference to be sensitively negotiated and contested, and a respect for 'otherness' to be developed and enhanced.

If we return to the introduction to part two, however, we see that Kershaw (1992:60) in his theorisations of community theatre, has argued that community theatre companies aim to "...empower people through encouraging the continuous regeneration of the spirit of community" (emphasis added). I understand Kershaw's argument here as being concerned with the 'cohesive' and 'unifying' powers of community. Not only does the vocabulary Kershaw employs (i.e., 'regeneration', 'spirit of community') signify a powerful sense of the nostalgic recuperation of the past, but it also suggests that community theatre companies aim to empower people by 'generating again' and 'bringing into renewed existence', a shared sense of communal harmony. In this, community theatre companies can be seen to be veering back into myth - the myth of traditional community - in a bid to collectively empower their audiences.

It follows from this that distinctions between traditional and progressive approaches to theatre in the community are not so easily drawn. The 'community' of community theatre has been conceived as dynamic and developmental, and also timeless and unchanging. We could probably deduce from this that community theatre companies work with both harmonious and contested constructions of community. Thus utilisations of 'community' can be progressive and regressive; heterogeneous and homogeneous; idealistic and pragmatic, etc. Whilst, then, the deployment of 'community' in the discourse of community theatre refers to the negotiation of internal differences, in practice, invocations of the term have also been heavily shaped by organic and unified notions of community.
To conclude Part two, I have explored the ideal of an organic, wholesome and unified notion of community, variously reflected in the work of Tönnies (1887), Wirth (1938) and Frankenberg (1966). This, coupled with the reworking of ideas of community suggested by Massey (1994; 1995) Hall (1992) and others, has provided the basis for understanding the 'community' of community theatre as a process constituted in two parts - harmonious and contested. In Part three, I intend to show how geographical analysis of the arts has also been shaped by dualisms (i.e., text/practice), through a context of broader questions about the cultural geographies of community theatre.

**Part Three - The Cultural Geographies of Community Theatre**

Part three explores the 'cultural geographies of community theatre', concentrating particularly on the geographers' interests in text and performance, and more concretely on the material and imaginative geographies of theatre in the community. The first section argues that geographical analysis pursued in the arts has been shaped by conceptual distinctions of 'text' and 'practice'. It shows how geographers have been largely concerned with 'art' as text and 'textualising' the arts, before going on to look at geographical interventions that have embraced 'art' (and particularly theatre) as practice. In considering how the notion of 'performativity' further allows geographers to move beyond the textual, the latter part of the section examines how notions of 'performativity' and 'embodiment' have been utilised in geography. This first section, in highlighting the fact that the arts have largely escaped critical, geographical attention, provides a context for the development of the arts as a legitimate area of geographical study.

Drawing on the insights of the first section - which establishes the many points of conceptual and theoretical relevance of geographical work in the arts to my
study - the second section continues to map out alternative ways of theorising the arts, by exploring the cultural geographies of community theatre. First, it outlines the thesis interests in the spatialities of theatre in the community, and then an effort is made to detail the geographical dimensions of community theatre. The section concludes by assessing how a substantial focus on the cultural geographies of community theatre encourages new ways of thinking about space, place, identity and locality.

2.4 Cultural Geography and the Arts: Text v Practice

Despite the growth of research in (British) cultural geography in the past two decades, work on the arts remains oddly neglected. Interest in the arts was first promoted in the 1960s/70s, in a bid to open geography to new fields, and to re-centre geography’s focus on the ‘human perspective’ (see Cloke et al (1991) for their chapter on the ‘peopling’ of human geography). It follows that humanistic geographers were also seeking to challenge the ‘conservative’ status quo that the quantitative revolution was thought to be producing (Smith, 2000). Geographical interventions on the arts have varied with time and theoretical frameworks. They have been restricted, however, to a predominantly ‘instrumentalist’ approach to ‘aesthetic objects’.

Mark Brosseau (1994) suggests this when writing about the various ways that ‘literature’ has been integrated into the broader intellectual project of geography. According to Brosseau, the ‘instrumental’ use of literature in geography - which he describes as the predominant use of literary sources to approve or provide answers for geographical hypotheses - is also indicative of the tension between objectivity and subjectivity. He warns, however, that in using literature in this way, geographers have failed to recognise the intricate and complex ways in which ‘texts’ signify. Cultural geographers focusing on the politics of popular culture have similarly criticised
geographers for their neglect or otherwise 'nervous' handling of popular cultural products (for example, see Wall, 2000).

Within this circumspect use of artistic genres there has been an intellectual emphasis on 'art' as text and on 'textualising' the arts. In this way, one of the most persistent themes has been the examination of 'landscape perception' (Cosgrove, 1984; Cosgrove and Daniels, 1988; Daniels, 1993). Dennis Cosgrove and Steven Daniels, in their influential book The Iconography of Landscape (1988), have, for example, signalled a new approach to cultural geography by showing how landscape is perceived through artistic representation. In this book they state:

"[A] landscape is a cultural image, a pictorial way of representing, structuring and symbolising surroundings. This is not to say that they are immaterial. They may be represented in a variety of materials and on many surfaces in paint on canvas, in writing on paper, in the earth, stone, water and vegetation on the ground" (Cosgrove & Daniels, 1988: 17).

The iconography of landscape refers to the understanding of landscape as 'text' - as 'deposits of cultural meaning' (Cosgrove, 2000), which embody patterns of power, hegemony and domination. In Cosgrove's individual work (1984), he identifies landscape as 'a way of seeing' that is characteristically bourgeois. In this, he takes a Marxist analysis of the role of capitalism to show how landscape is concerned with the consolidation of power relations in society. Cosgrove traces the evolution of landscape to 15th (and early 16th) century Italy, a period when Europeans were considered to be preoccupied with the visual, and in fact were dependent upon the visual - the survey, mapmaking, merchant trading - to consolidate the capitalist enterprise. For Cosgrove, the visual power given by the landscape way of seeing is inextricably linked to relations of power between humans and their environment - relations, which are unstable over time and inherently political.
This has been exemplified in Daniel's *Fields of Vision* (1993), in which he provides argued reflections on the centrality of landscape images in the framing of nation and national identity. In this book, Daniels interrogates the production and consumption of landscape paintings and in doing so reveals the deeply rooted relationship they have to national identity. These identities are framed within 'simple pictures of country scenes', and are defined by "stories of golden ages, enduring traditions, heroic deeds and dramatic destinies located in ancient or promised home-lands with hallowed sites and scenery" (Daniels, 1993:8).

It follows that studies of landscape perception have had much influence on the social scientific understanding of the representational practices through which specific landscapes acquire meaning and value (see also Jackson, 1989). They have also allowed for the incorporation of individual, imaginative and creative human experience into research on the geographic environment. Such studies, however, have been dominated by a 'literary' approach which views landscape as a textual reference to 'visual' media. Whilst I have no wish to undermine the importance of 'looking' to matters of space, place and landscape, I would argue that the tendency to textualise the visual, so that it is fixed and "...can be written about ...[has meant that few geographers have focused on how the visual is]...seen, sensed and experienced" (Smith, 1997:503). Following Bourdieu (1993), Bonnett (1992), and Wolff (1988), I contend that an analytical focus on the spatialities of the arts, and specifically the theatre, can enable us to develop fuller perspectives on artistic practice, as well as expanding the agenda for a more critical cultural geography.

Susan Smith (1997: 502) has argued: "Art matters to the subject of geography because the production, performance and consumption of art are so often mediated by spatial strategies and metaphors". Theatre, then, by its very nature, is relevant to the subject of geography; indeed, geographers have
examined the visual images of theatre and have interpreted them as productive metaphors for the landscape since the late 1970s. J.B Jackson (1980), for example, has argued that theatre can be seen as a metaphor for the world and human life, and as a vehicle for interpreting the social and political meanings of landscapes (see also, Cosgrove and Jackson, 1987; Cosgrove and Daniels, 1989). Such work has been particularly influential in alerting geographers to the meaning and reality of visual images. It can also be credited as enhancing geography’s analytical powers. Despite this, very little detailed research on the theatre has been undertaken. Nor have many geographers - with the exception of a few I will go on to explore shortly - attended to the non-textual elements of theatre.

As mentioned previously, cultural geographers have emphasised how the arts are a significant social practice through which meanings are made and relations of power established and challenged, but they have done so through a focus on paintings and painters. More recently, geographers have also looked at representational discourse in film (Rose, 1994; Dixon & Cresswell, 2002), and have travelled through ‘Writing Worlds’ in order to illustrate the cultural meanings embedded in text (Barnes and Duncan, 1992; see also, Duncan & Ley, 1993; and Dyer, 1993). Whilst both in practice and analysis, theatre can be read as text - as witnessed by critiques of the predominant use of commercial theatre for the illusionistic representation of novels or staged dialogues - theatricality holds other possibilities. For example, Bruce Braun (1993) argues for the need to see theatre, not just as an artistic practice, but as an important site where social identities and relations are constituted. A number of geographers, namely Richa Nagar (2000), Doreen Mattingly (2001) and Gillian Rose (1997), have theorised theatre in this way, and have embraced performance as practice, in the context of its creation and staging. In doing so, they have influenced the development of my own thinking in this research project.
Richa Nagar (2000) has provided an important contribution to the work on geography and the arts by seeing space and spatial relations as central to her ethnographic study of a women's street theatre campaign in North India. Nagar— who situates her work within recent feminist writings on empowerment and violence—discusses the ways in which marginalised women use street theatre (a play called Mujhe Fawab Do! and accompanying Phad⁵) to address domestic violence. By examining the socio-spatial circuits of the 'Chitrakoot' street campaign, Nagar identifies a 'spatially informed' (feminist) politics, which transgresses socially constructed divides—between the public and the private, and the home and the community. In this, Nagar challenges 'constricting' notions of theatre as an 'art' object to be studied as text. She emphasises the 'discursive geographies' of theatre, and in doing so reveals how participation in Mujhe Fawab Do! and the Phad, allowed women to construct and reconstruct themselves, "to evaluate and enact their stories, and critique the structures that marginalise them" (Nagar, 2000:358). By further stressing the importance of understanding the spatial politics that were at the core of the theatre campaign, Nagar alerts us to the fact that a geographically informed perspective can illuminate the way in which social identity is embedded in spatial contexts. In doing so, she provides an incisive intervention into the work on geography and the arts.

Doreen Mattingly (2001), through her ethnographic study of a community arts programme - Around the World in a Single Day - targeted at 'at risk' teenagers in San Diego, California, has also explored the relationship between art and geography. She discusses two aspects of representation - 'narrative

⁵ A Phad is a picture story that is enacted by two people.
authority' and 'symbolic economy'⁶ - and analyses the effects of each in relation to the students involved in Around the World and the impoverished neighbourhood - 'City Heights' - in which they live. Mattingly explains that teenagers - and especially those - living in deprived areas, are simultaneously vulnerable and dangerous, and this renders them susceptible to the politics of representation in these 'neighbourhoods'. By showing how an increased 'narrative authority' in Around the World empowered students, Mattingly thus unveils the importance of narrative authority in providing a means for typically marginalised communities to directly challenge negative representations. Mattingly goes on to illustrate how the meaning and power of peripheral voices is also shaped by the representation of place in the 'symbolic economy'. While using the community arts project as a vehicle for discussing narrative authority and symbolic economy, Mattingly also demonstrates the potential of community theatre to give voice to those previously unheard. She additionally stresses the 'transformative' power of theatre, and its ability "...to transcend the representational limits of academic discourse by offering subjects more authority over the representation of their voices and speaking to audiences outside of academia" (Mattingly, 2001:449). Mattingly makes indispensable contributions to geographical and aesthetic thought, moving away from an 'instrumental' conception of theatre, to engage with the creation and performance of Around the World.

Gillian Rose (1997) makes a further contribution to the geography and arts literature through her studies of the 'imagined geographies of community arts projects'. Drawing on current discussions about the discursive construction of space, Rose's empirical research examines the spatialities through which community arts workers, map notions of 'community'. Underpinning her

⁶ 'Narrative authority' pertains to who gets heard and whose stories get told and 'symbolic economy' concerns the role of culture and place imagery in the economy of the flow of investment capital.
analysis is an incisive understanding of 'community' and of the incessant power relations embedded within it. Rose rejects 'essentialising fantasies' of community and provides evidence from in-depth interviews to illustrate that community arts workers radicalise notions of the term by placing it in a 'geography of lack'. First, by naming the communities they work with as 'peripheral', 'powerless' and 'marginalised', community arts workers radicalise 'community' by not essentialising difference. Secondly, Rose argues that community arts workers articulate a sense of 'mobile' community - which reverberates with Massey's conception of a 'global sense of place' (1994) - in which 'community' is predicated on the acknowledgement of contingency, partiality and absence. This, according to Rose, produces a complex and uncertain spatiality, but allows those silenced by their marginalization to speak, participate - in arts projects, productions etc. - as collectives. By problematizing understandings of community and accentuating the spatialities through which community arts workers radicalise the term, Rose further alerts us to the tensions and ambiguities of 'community theatre'. In so doing, she provides key insights into art and geography.

Nagar, Mattingly and Rose have focused on the socio-spatial constitution of artistic performance, and in this way embrace art as practice. Nagar and Mattingly's work demonstrates - by emphasising the disruptive and subversive power of theatre - the need to see theatre as more than an artistic object. Rose's work highlights the important place of 'community' within relationships between theatre and communities. In the following section, I will explore how the concept of 'performativity' - a term deriving from J.L. Austins 'performative utterances', and which implies 'action', 'doing' and 'embodied' involvement - offers geographers a further means of moving beyond the textual, and engage with more embodied geographies. In doing so, I seek to understand how attention to the performative, can enable me to fully capture the 'multiplicity', 'diversity' and 'heterogeneity' of community theatre.
2.4.1 Cultural geography and Performativity

Geographers have shown a growing interest in performativity. They have begun to look more carefully at how the language of performance can be used to rethink notions of embodiment, subjectivity and social identity. The work of Catherine Nash (2001) has most usefully illuminated the need to move from 'text' and 'representations', to 'performance' and 'practices'. In this, her work echoes the concerns raised by Schechner and other performance theorists. Nash, however, extends this analytical seam, by exploring the 'imaginative' and 'material' geographies of performance and embodiment. Drawing on feminist writings on the performance of gender and sexuality - and most notably the work of Judith Butler (1990; 1993) - Nash examines how performativity has been taken up in geography. Her interrogation spans a variety of interventions that geographers (for example, Thrift, 1996,1997,1999; Driver and Gilbert, 1998; Ogborn, 1998; Jacobs, 1998; Malbon, 1999; and Jackson, 1999) have made in service of a more performative and embodied understanding of space and place; the construction of social identity; planning and conservation; identity and social identifications; and the socio-political sphere.

Such an interrogation, however, does not proceed without Nash alerting geographers to the risks attached to employing the vocabulary of performance without thinking through the genealogy of performance's concepts. In fact, a critical question for Nash concerns 'what is to be gained - by geography - from the metaphorical and substantive turn from 'text' and representations, to performance and practices'? Using Thrift's notion of 'non representational theory', which "...is concerned with 'practices' through which we become 'subjects' de-centred, affective, but embodied, relational, expressive and involved with others and objects..." (Nash, 2001: 5), Nash thus attempts to demonstrate what the reorientation of geography towards
practices might mean. If I have read Nash's arguments correctly, then one of the main ways in which the language of performance (and dance) has contributed to geography is by helping geographers approach subjectivity in relation to issues of place, space and identity. Further still, the metaphor of performance has destabilised - by undermining the written and spoken word - static representations of meaning, to suggest alternative, embodied ways of knowing and perceiving.

In the context of my own project, such findings are particularly valuable because they enable me to theorise the complexities of community theatre in ways which 'embody' its multiplicity and diversity of meaning. In this way, while embracing the 'doings' and 'showings' of a more performatively minded geography, I move closer to an understanding of how the spatialities through which community theatre companies map notions of community, should be conceived. And it is to the spatialities of community theatre that I now turn.

2.5 Mapping the Cultural Geographies of Community Theatre

I have chosen in this thesis to examine the 'cultural geographies of community theatre'. In this section I want to discuss what a cultural geographic perspective on community theatre attends to, and make explicit the interconnectedness of space, place, and community theatre experiences. In so doing, I seek to show how an appreciation of theatre offers a route into those geographies which lie beyond the textual.

My strategy for examining the 'cultural geographies of community theatre', is to study the geographical spaces - spaces which are real and imagined, material and symbolic - of theatre in the community. I shall be concerned,
then, with spatialising the practice and performance of community theatre, and in exploring the various spatial contexts of artistic practice.

An attention to the 'history', 'theatre' and 'community' of community theatre, as well as to actual writings on community theatre (i.e., Gooch, 1984; van Erven, 2001), has confirmed the geographical constitution of theatre in the community. It follows that Gooch (1984), in his theorisation of community theatre suggests a number of ways community theatre might be identified which are inherently geographical. For example, community theatre can be defined by place or locality, and also by a sharing of cultural preference. Such insights have clear potential to be developed geographically. That is, proper analysis needs to be given to, for example, the place/location of community theatre companies: what is the character of such places; what impact does the siting of community theatre companies in these places have on identity formation, or in creating a sense of belonging to that particular place? The connectedness of place and community, and the relationship between the local and the global are issues which have been discussed by Massey (1994). If, as Massey points out, places are not bounded, but part of a globalised network of cultural flows and connections, then this raises the issue of whether there are similarly localised and globalised understandings of place-based community in the practice of community theatre.

Certainly - and with regards to 'culturally-based' definitions of theatre in the community - notions of the local may be derived from imagined connections with the national or diasporic, such as a shared 'Black' aesthetic. Consideration, then, needs to be given to the tensions between global, diasporic, national and local understandings of shared identity, and to community theatre’s role in constructing such understandings.
Clearly there is a 'geography' to approaches to theatre in the community which needs to be drawn out within the parameters of this study. Also within this study, there is a need to explore the geographies produced through community theatre, highlighted by Kershaw (1992) and van Erven (2001), to examine the feelings of 'community' or 'communality' said to characterise the creation and performance of community theatre. It will also be important to examine the socio-spatial notions of access and involvement, and particularly how they impact the lived experiences of community theatre companies.

There is also evidence to suggest that the performance of community theatre is constructed and negotiated spatially. We have seen from the 'theatre' and 'performance' literature, for example, that community theatre performances often occur outside of theatre buildings; problematize conventional divides between performers and audiences; and often incorporate both professional and community artists. Moreover, Turner (1999) has shown that in the past, community theatre performances have been highly portable, and actors/actresses often played amongst audiences rather than to them. Questions, then, need to be raised concerning the microgeographies of stage and performance, the different geographies of audience and performer contact, and the fixed and mobile geographies of site-specific and promenade (community) theatre.

To conclude this brief section, I have used the literature on community theatre to map the spatialities of theatre in the community. What I have hoped to highlight are the possible directions for researching community theatre's 'cultural geographies'. Such a study is of significant import to the cultural turn in geography which, as we have seen, has been largely dominated by a 'textual approach to research. In exploring the cultural geographies of community theatre, this project seeks to show how an appreciation of the place of theatre adds to understandings of space, place and identity.
Conclusions

The aim of this theoretical review has been to critically explore the existing literature on community and performance. A related objective has been to gain a better understanding of community theatre. Much has been gained, I believe, from examining the 'history', 'community' and 'theatre' of community theatre. While revealing how theatre in the community was shaped by various theories and traditions; is inextricably linked to community; and is rooted in the language of theatre and performance, such an examination also made visible the dualisms of text/practice, harmony/contestation and representation/presentation which frame its practice. These dualisms have been illuminating not only for what they reveal about community theatre and how it might be conceptualised, but for unveiling community theatre's ambivalence and multiplicity of meaning.

Tracing the genealogies of theatre in the community, in Part one, for example, has led me to conclude that community theatre is nested within a framework of ideas about text and practice. While Aristophanes, Brecht, Growtowski and Shakespeare's involvement of audiences corresponded with The Combination's concern to generate argument and debate, this 'participative' thread is also linked to the idea of 'practice'. It is in this sense that The Combination's performance of The Wasps broke with narrative, to disrupt and comment upon the everyday practices of a job centre. Moreover, in being staged in a job centre, such performance challenged ideas of theatre occurring only in 'theatre' buildings, and further, conventional distinctions between actors/actresses and spectators. On another level, however, The Combination - as with the medieval morality plays - can be seen to be positively embracing the instructional character of 'text'. This is evidenced in The Combination's arrival in Deptford, where it became a necessity for the
company to find plays which were relevant to, and which would inform the community in some way.

In an attempt to assess whether parallels can be drawn between current practices of community theatre and the earlier community theatre movement, I have also examined contemporary theorisations of theatre in the community. Such theorisations revealed that current practices of community theatre are less 'strident' than those of their predecessors. They also revealed that while modern day companies represent themselves in a variety of ways, utilising often competing definitions of 'community', the central thread linking contemporary and early community theatre is 'participation'. In the later stages of Part one, and in an effort to theorise the 'theatre' of community theatre, I turned to the realm of performance. By examining the dichotomy between theatre and performance, I showed how the tropes of performance - i.e., dismantling textual authority, breaking barriers between actors/actresses and spectators etc - are also key characteristics of community theatre. However, the notion that performance fully transgresses barriers to an inclusive and accessible theatre experience is untenable. As I have shown, performance can be subject to the same limitations as theatre, because, in the absence of narrative, it requires those with cultural capital to appreciate and conceive it. In arguing that divides between theatre and performance are not so easily drawn, I have thus argued that characteristics of theatre - i.e., textual performance in theatre buildings - can also be identified in theatre in the community.

Part two continued exploration of the dualistic structure of theatre in the community, by examining the 'community' of community theatre. In this way, I have examined how notions of community are shaped by, on the one hand, arguments - i.e., Massey, Hall, etc - that position community as a progressively dynamic process, in which difference is challenged and
contested; and on the other, by nostalgic, romantic conceptualisations, which convey a sense of longing for an idyllic past - i.e., Tönnies, Wirth, etc. An important consequence of thinking about community in this way, has been the light it throws on community theatre. If community theatre is both about contestation and harmony, then it is possible that the forms of community presumed in and produced through the practices of community theatre companies are simultaneously negotiated and constructed.

Part three explored the 'cultural geographies of community theatre'. To demonstrate the importance of the arts to geography, I discussed both geographical research within the arts and also the theatre. After arguing that geographers have largely grappled with art as 'text', I have explored geographical interventions that have embraced art as 'practice'. In latter part of this section, I examined how the language of performance and dance have been utilised in geography. In building on the insights of the arts and geography literature, the final section discussed 'the cultural geographies of community theatre'. In this way, I have detailed community theatre's many geographical dimensions, and illuminated the importance of theatre in the community to matters of space and place.

Thinking about community theatre in this way not only allows me to examine its socio-spatial constitution, but also the different forms of community produced through its performances.
Chapter Three

Research Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In chapter two, I framed my research questions in terms of the existing literature on community and performance. Such a review - whilst demonstrating the significant contribution studies have made to the social scientific understanding of certain artistic genres and practices - brought critical research within the arts into question. Apart from being largely neglected by geographers, work on the arts has shown a lack of recognition for the fundamentally socio-spatial ways in which artistic forms are constituted. Furthermore, when the arts have been approached they have been dominated by research into the ways in which meaning is produced through power-laden operations of visuality (see Rose, 1993 for a critique) and textuality (Barnes and Duncan, 1992). I have argued that a lack of explicit engagement with the non-textual aspects of artistic forms has led to the partial silencing of them as 'performative' experiences. The conceptual reasons for analysing the forms of 'community' presumed in and produced through the performances of community theatre companies, therefore - and as such, for examining their socio-spatial constitution - reflects my concern to elaborate a more embodied and performative way of thinking about theatre in the community (see Nash 2001; and Thrift 1996, 1997, 1999). As Plastow (1998) contends, "...the text-based study to which the academy has so often limited itself is surely as partial a basis for making judgements as a deaf man watching an orchestra" (p.4). I have therefore sought to utilise a research design that would allow me to move beyond the analysis of text and representation to performance and practices.

The research design, which I developed, centred on a combination of qualitative methods - the in-depth semi-structured interview and participant
observation. I opted to use these methods because I believed that they would allow me to answer the research questions within a framework that engaged with the embodiment, practice and performance of community theatre companies. In this way, I have followed Mattingly (2001); Nagar (2000); and Rose (1997), whose studies of the theatre have all employed the in-depth interview and/or other ethnographic procedures. Ethnographic methods like interviewing and participant observation aim for depth rather than coverage. They achieve a specific relationship between the researcher and participant, connecting them in ways which allow for meanings and 'motives for actions' to be freely and jointly conveyed. This can be seen in contrast to, for example, questionnaire surveys and similar quantitative methods, which tend to mask individuality and limit the scope in which participants can speak and interact with the researcher. As I shall go on to argue in section 3.2, in-depth interviews and participant observation became vehicles for deriving a more nuanced understanding of community theatre, and for enabling me to interrogate the different forms of community that are made through performance and practice. The triangulation of these data-sources, as Hoggart et al (2002) write, "[further enhanced my]...capacities for interpreting meaning...because the insight gained...strengthen[ed] confidence in conclusions by providing multiple routes to the same result" (p.67).

Whilst recognising that participant observation would allow me to document aspects of the 'community theatre' participatory experience that could not be attained through the interview process, I had no wish to privilege either method as being more informative. Each has its own limitations. It follows that the efficacy of interviews is largely determined by the interpersonal skills of the interviewer, and the information generated through them is limited to only one person's perspective. Similarly, the relationship that exists between the researcher and the researched in participant observation can be fraught
with difficulties. It is notoriously difficult for researchers to gain access to, and become an integral part of the activities in the communities they wish to study. The ethics of ethnographic research have also been increasingly questioned. Such questions relate to the covert methods of observation sometimes employed, and also to the fact that ethnographers - who have been predominantly 'White' and male - have traditionally chosen to observe the working class or other 'foreign' cultures. More generally, commentators have remarked on the narrow range of skills offered by existing qualitative methods. Nigel Thrift (2000b:3), for instance contemplates the significance of methodology in relation to the cultural turn in human geography and comments: "...how wedded they [qualitative methods] still are to the notion of bringing back the 'data', and then re-presenting it (nicely packaged up as a few supposedly illustrative quotations) and the narrow range of sensate life they register".

In this chapter, I elaborate on the above issues examining the nature of the research methodology and the practical engagement of the research. I offer a critical self-reflective evaluation of my own positionality within the research process and in representing the lives of others. Drawing on postmodernist critiques of ethnography (Clifford and Marcus, 1989) and the methodological questions raised by feminist geographers more generally (McDowell, 1992; Rose, 1993), I seek to problematise my role as interviewer and participant observer, recognising that neither involve neutral procedures and are instead social interactions embedded in power relations. Crucial to the self-reflective evaluation of my participation in acquiring knowledge, is the engagement of the insider/outsider problematic. I thus describe my own status as an 'insider' actress carrying out research on theatre companies and also as a 'Black woman' investigating a 'peripheral' art form. I discuss too, my experiences and positioning as a researcher in the field and as such, as an 'outsider' - in terms of my social positioning and in not authentically belonging - to the
communities I research. The chapter is structured in four main parts. Section 3.2 discusses the research design in relation to its effectiveness in approaching the research questions. Section 3.3 begins the process of outlining the specifics of the research in practice. After detailing the ways in which the sample of community theatre companies was obtained, the section goes on to describe the nature of the interviewing process. Section 3.4 focuses on the construction of the case studies. It begins with an analysis of how the case studies were chosen, before describing the general characteristics of each company. This is followed by an account of the ethnographic procedures undertaken with each case study and of the difficulties/dilemmas faced in the practical engagement of the research. The final section, 3.5, offers some reflection on the research process, paying particular attention to the implications of my own positioning as a 'Black' woman, an actress and a consumer of knowledge. Throughout this chapter I will draw on excerpts from my field diary and interview dialogue to illustrate the interactive and embodied features of the research methodology.

3.2 Developing an Ethnographic Research Methodology

My ethnographic methodology for this research involved semi-structured interviews with the directors, outreach workers and administrators of twenty community theatre companies, and participant observation in three community theatre settings - the London Bubble (East London); Outside Edge (South London); and Tamasha (North London) - between February 2000 and July 2001. This section outlines the specifics of an ethnographic approach and assesses its usefulness in investigating the research questions. It begins with a general description of ethnography as a particular method and then as a set of (specific) methods that were deemed appropriate for the research. In discussing the strengths and weaknesses of each method, I go on to elaborate
on the research design I chose and the reasons it offered the best means of answering the research questions.

3.2.1 Ethnography as method

Ethnography is an approach that places the researcher in the daily lives of those he or she studies. It involves the ethnographer "...watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned" (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1989: 2). In its simplest form, ethnography can be described as a three-stage process:

1. Researcher gains access to a particular community.

2. Researcher lives and/or works among people under study in order to take on their worldviews and ways of life.

3. Researcher travels back to the academy to make sense of the above through writing an account of that community's 'culture' (taken from Cook & Crang, 1995).

Ethnography is not therefore an approach that relies on statistical inference, but instead requires sensitivity, perception, reflexivity and interpretation. It calls for researchers as 'social actors' to immerse themselves in the attitudes, values and conflicts of a particular community, in an effort to understand and 'see' the world in the same way as they do. As a result, ethnography is often dismissed on the grounds that it is 'too subjective' and 'imprecise' to serve as solid scientific data.\(^1\) Such judgements, however, betray scepticism in the

\(^1\) Such accusations reveal a history of devaluing 'subjective' methods and of excluding them from social scientific research. This can be seen in the geographer's reluctance to integrate the landscape concept, literary sources and the arts generally, into the broader intellectual framework of geography.
evaluative capacities of qualitative techniques. David Best (2000: 6), in commenting on the importance of the arts has argued: "we need to reject ...[assumptions] that the only objective assessment is scientific. [O]bjective assessment by judgement is often more difficult, less clear-cut and certain, than measurement, but that is precisely because we are dealing with human beings not machines....[T]he most crucial aspects of human beings cannot be neatly measured". Best's perception of the value of assessment by judgement clearly derives from its ability to convey 'crucial aspects' of the human experience, aspects that cannot be measured or quantified. Many commentators regard this as the fundamental strength of ethnography, arguing that methods such as the formal interview and questionnaire survey fail to capture the distinctive character of the social world and/or human behaviour. According to Hammersley and Atkinson (1989: 2), "[a]ll social researchers feel the tension between conceptions of science modelled on the practices of natural science on the one hand, and ideas about the distinctiveness of the social world and the implications of this for how it should be studied on the other". Certainly, the importance of understanding community theatre through its embodiment, practice and performance meant that I was ultimately committed to a qualitative methodology. Yet recognising the problems of accuracy associated with ethnography, I considered using a mixture of methods, and indeed embarking on a 'methodological pluralism' (a term suggested by Bryman, 1988), to strengthen and solidify validity claims. In this way, "...truth [would become]... objective inasmuch as it [was] the product of an inter subjective consensus" (Brosseau, 1994:336).

3.2.2 Ethnography as a set of methods

Participant observation, in-depth interviewing and focus groups, etc can be seen as part of a range of qualitative methods employed in ethnography. With participant observation generally understood as the core element in any
ethnographic approach, I considered the value of drawing on both the in-depth interview - which has been utilised by other researchers carrying out similar ethnographic research - and focus groups, to enhance understanding of the research questions. In what follows I shall briefly discuss the characteristics and possibilities of each research strategy, noting their strengths and weaknesses respectively. I shall then go on to outline the chosen methodology and the reasons it offered the best potential for the research.

Participant Observation

Participant Observation involves the intense involvement of researchers in the everyday lives of those they research. It can be overt - when the researcher reveals to participants what he/she is doing - or covert - when the researcher does not tell participants they are being studied. The extent to which the researcher moves from an 'observer' to 'participant' can also vary, with some investigations demanding complete observation/participation and others, often a combination of both. As I mentioned in chapter two, much of the work on the theatre has been carried out via ethnographic studies, which have incorporated participant observation. For example, Nagar's (2000) ethnographic research was based on her active involvement in a women's street theatre campaign in the impoverished district of Chitrakoot, North India. Through participant observation and personal involvement as a supporter and helper, Nagar gained an understanding of how women affected by domestic violence came to mobilise themselves in powerful ways.

In terms of my own research, participant observation offers the potential of allowing me to produce rich detail about community theatre companies in their everyday contexts and thus (more) 'naturalised' settings. This would have the added benefit of putting participants at ease (see Western, 1992), which would further allow for the attainment of more reliable responses. It
follows that, especially in this context, I would be able to get to know participants in much greater depth than is attainable from say, an interview or informal questionnaire. Moreover, my own theatrical and dramatic training would provide me with skills to offer the groups. I regularly attend an acting class (at 'The Academy School for Drama', Whitechapel) and I also work as an actress for an acting agency. The aforementioned, I believed, coupled with an 'A' level in Theatre Studies, would hold me in good stead for carrying out 'complete' participant observation in the environments of community theatre companies. Such factors would also allow me to construct in-depth information on the imagined and material spatialities of community theatre; the impact of community theatre on performers/participants; and the forms of inclusion, access and involvement which characterise community theatre.2

Whilst I recognised the problems associated with participant observation - that it generates vast amounts of material, and researchers can often get bogged down with the various themes and ideas that emerge - the specificities of an ethnographic approach, and also my commitment to using methods that would allow me to engage with the embodiment, practice and performance of community theatre companies, meant that participant observation would form the core of my research.

In-depth Interviews

In-depth interviews allow researchers to derive an understanding of how participants view the world, as well as an appreciation of the subjective meanings they ascribe to it. The work of Gillian Rose (1997), which is credited in the previous chapter as being influential on my research, was based on in-depth interviews with community arts workers in the city of Edinburgh. Rose's utilisation of this technique not only gave workers the scope to speak for themselves but also enabled her to determine the ways in

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2 See research questions three, five and six, Chapter One, p.19.
which they radicalised the notion of 'community'. A key question in my own research into theatre in the community companies revolves around the forms of community theatre that are in existence in London - which would involve extensive research into their places and forms of performance and also their publicly stated relationships to 'community'. Another important issue centres on the motivations behind community theatre workers becoming involved in community theatre. In-depth, semi-structured interviews would have the advantage of allowing me to generate information about such topics very quickly, as well as concentrating on the attitudes and experiences of directors, managers, outreach workers, etc, based in a particular company. Ultimately, however, this information would be limited to what respondents said, rather than what they did. Moreover, the interviews would not be able to cover aspects of the community theatre participatory experience sufficiently. Thus, while I incorporated individual interviews into the research design, they proved more effective closely allied to the practice of participant observation.

Focus Groups

The focus group also called the 'group interview', centres on group discussions that are focussed around questions raised by a moderator (see Kneale, 2001). I initially contemplated using focus group discussions as a means to explore the experiences of the audiences of community theatre. Certainly, conducting focus groups with audiences that encounter the performances of community theatre companies would permit me to (more directly), investigate the communal experiences of those at performances, as well as to address issues relating to the consumption patterns of community

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3 See research question one of Chapter One, p.18.
4 See research question two of Chapter One, p.18.
theatre companies. Unlike the individual interviews, such focus groups would allow participants to negotiate and contest issues with other audience members. Further still, the ‘focus’ would not be on my own ability to derive meaning from a set of individual statements, but rather on the potential for audiences to express their own shared views about a particular performance.

Constructing a research design that included focus groups, however, also raised significant difficulties (which I shall also elaborate on in section 3.4). I had envisaged recruiting audiences through ‘flyers’ requesting interviews, which would be handed out before the performance and returned at the end. In this way, a sample of the audience would be approached at a later time. However, most contemporary live performances and more specifically, ‘theatre in the community’ performances occur outside of theatre buildings. An issue arising here, therefore, was of a logistical nature and involved working through the ways in which I would be able to obtain - via flyers - information from audiences in cases where performances had taken place in, for example, a park? Handing out the flyers did not pose an immediate problem, getting them back however, proved slightly problematic. Whilst, then, I endeavoured to incorporate focus groups into the research design, in practice I did not conduct any group interviews, because I found it too difficult to recruit them. However, as detailed below, I did carry out conversational interviewing with the audience members at community theatre performances. This enabled me to explore some of the questions I had about the consumption of community theatre by audiences.

The Research Design

In keeping with the principle of ‘performativity’ that drives this research, I resolved to approach the research questions using in-depth interviews and participant observation. Despite some of the difficulties outlined above, I

See research questions four and five of Chapter One, p.19.
decided to use these methods because I believed that they offered the most potential for the research project. My research methodology was comprised of three strands:

I. Semi-structured interviews with a stratified sample of 20 community theatre companies in London. The companies were selected largely from the listings of ‘community’ in the ‘British Performing Arts Year Book’, but also through contacts that I made through attending a five-day workshop on ‘Forum Theatre’. The interviews served three main purposes: firstly, they acted as a catalyst for dialogue about issues of particular interest/concern to respondents; Secondly, they generated contextual data that informed the second, intensive stage of the research process; and thirdly, they allowed me to decide a) where participant observation should or could take place, and b) what particular aspects would be analysed by participant observation. The interviews addressed issues such as the types of community theatre companies operating in London, their places and forms of performance and their relationships to ‘community’ (research question 1). They were taped, transcribed and qualitatively coded.

II. Ethnographic research with the performers and directors of three case study companies. From this sample of twenty, and based on information obtained through interviews, three companies - the London Bubble, Outside Edge and Tamasha - were selected for intensive, in-depth investigation. In order to obtain a more corporeal understanding of how notions of ‘community’ are produced through the performances of community theatre companies, I carried out participant observation and conversational ethnographic interviewing in each community theatre setting. The aforementioned, coupled with the keeping of a research diary, allowed me to construct more in-depth data on
research question 2 - i.e., the institutional status of groups and biographical information on the performers and managers (this had been partly ascertained through the interview schedule). I was further able to examine the spatial strategies and metaphors embedded in the spaces of community theatre (research question 3); the affects of community theatre on performers and participants (research question 5); and how notions of inclusion, access and involvement impact the lived experiences of community theatre companies (research question 6). Participant observation had the added advantage of being able to document aspects of the theatrical experience that were not raised in the interview process.

III. Ethnographic research of performances by the three case study companies: As part of this ethnographic work, I undertook participant observation of performances by the case study companies (in all cases, this involved my taking part in the rehearsal preparation of these performances). The number of performances and venues studied varied between groups. In all cases, however, participant observation allowed me to analyse the spatialities of performance - the different forms of spatial staging and positioning of actors/actresses to spectators, etc (research question 3) - as well as getting information on audiences - in terms of the practices they undertake and their social composition (research question 5). I also decided to use follow-up interviews after the performance phase. I was able to carry out such interviews with the directors of Outside Edge and Tamasha, and also with the marketing director of Tamasha.

In attempting to address the consumption practices that characterise community theatre (research question 4) and the impact of community theatre on identity formation (research question 5) more directly, I
undertook conversational ethnographic interviews with the audiences of the three case study performances. Further details of the times these took place are outlined below.

3.3 From Sample to Interview: An Overview of Community Theatre Companies in London

3.3.1 Obtaining the Sample

Box 3.1: ‘Obtaining the Sample’

Yvonne: Hello... I am a research student and I am very keen to interview community theatre companies in and around the London area. ...[W]ould you consider [name of theatre company] to be a community theatre company?

Respondent: I'm sorry, but we are a professional theatre company. We would never consider ourselves as 'community', we just don't do that. We perform in professional theatre venues and although we'd love to do something more for the community, we're just not able to do that at this point in time... You'd be better off trying somewhere else.6

The above excerpt is taken from a series of telephone interviews that were conducted with a sample of theatre companies in the germinative stages of this research. The sample was obtained from a section in 'Contacts' entitled, 'Theatre - Alternative, Community and Young People's', which contained listings of approximately one hundred and twenty theatre companies in England.7 As this source did not explicitly label companies, my objective in the telephone interviews had been to find out which companies engaged in 'theatre in the community' so that I could attempt to recruit them for in-depth study. Therein lay my first obstacle. From my experiences working as an actress for an

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6 Taken from a telephone interview conducted with a theatre company based in North London, Jan 2000.
7 I confined phone calls, however, to the seventy companies listed in the London area. I should state that nearly half of the numbers dialled were either 'unrecognisable' or for companies that were no longer in operation.
acting agency, I was aware that the term 'community theatre' carried something of an 'inferior' charge about it. There was a very high possibility therefore that many of the theatre companies I endeavoured to speak to, would take exception to my questioning of them as such.

Furthermore, and as I found in practice, using 'self-identification' to determine whether a company practised 'community theatre' created all sorts of exclusionary problems. For one, it excluded the companies that did not 'see' themselves as 'theatre in the community', and focused solely on those that did view themselves as such. Such an approach is also dependant on the particular conception of 'community theatre' held by an individual company. The respondent featured above, for example, conceptualises 'theatre in the community' in terms of professionalism. In this, community theatre comes to stand for a genre completely outside of the professional; it is seen as amateur and somehow secondary to performance that occurs in 'professional theatre venues'. Using self-identification as a means to define and access community theatre companies, I quickly became impatient with what I considered to be biased and unreflective responses that failed to do more than yield a reductive binary opposition between 'community' and 'established' theatre. I soon realised, however, that as well as being indicative of a generalised ambivalence towards community theatre, such responses were useful theoretically in developing the conceptualisation of the project. However, when used as a basis to identify community theatre companies, such answers - in hinging on a singular conception of theatre in the community - did not appear to consider the complex and varied nature of 'community'. I thus decided that I would have to develop a more open and expansive definition of community theatre, one, which in being attentive to the multiple

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8 Out of the thirty (plus) companies I got through to, only two of these considered themselves as community theatre.
understandings of community, would allow me to recruit and investigate a full range of community theatre companies.

My initial attempt to identify community theatre companies via telephone interviews thus proved challenging. As mentioned previously, part of this difficulty stemmed from the fact that I had been reliant on the self-labelling of companies as community theatre, and also partly because the source I was using - 'Contacts' - offered limited information. I acquired this source through attending a five-day workshop on 'Forum Theatre' in November 1999. Using the workshop as a means to grasp the main tenets of forum, and also a context in which I could engage in conversation about community theatre, I was further able to make use of a number of helpful suggestions in regards to the successful implementation of my research. 'Contacts' was one of two publications cited as useful and enabling in identifying community theatre companies - the other was the 'British Performing Arts Year Book'. The 'British Performing Arts Year Book' proved to be an illuminating sample frame. In explicitly labelling companies as 'community', this source also catalogued the type of (community) theatre that companies practised - for example, 'youth theatre', 'reminiscence theatre', 'prison drama' etc - their communal aims, styles of production, places of performance and internal staff composition. It was precisely this sense of range that I wished to retain in the recruitment of community theatre companies, because, as well as challenging stereotypical assumptions about 'community theatre' my objective was to interrogate companies with a diversity of understandings of community.

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9 I managed to recruit two companies out of the listings in 'Contacts'.

10 This workshop - which I learnt about through the friend of a fellow postgraduate that worked in theatre - was host to theatre workers, actors/actresses, directors and dramaturges, most of whom (to varying degrees and in different ways) were committed to using the arts as a tool for social change. It follows that I was able to make contact with a number of participants who were directly involved with companies that can be said to practice theatre in the community.

11 'Contacts' also happened to be the first source I was able to get hold of.
In practice, the majority of participants were recruited through the 'British Performing Arts Year Book'. A much smaller sample was obtained from 'Contacts' and through the contacts that I made at the forum theatre workshop. What became clear in the second phase of telephone interviewing, was that the companies I selected not only seemed to cover a wide spectrum of performance genres, but were also complexly multifaceted in their understandings of community. The main challenge, then, was to successfully recruit these companies for interviews. This called for - as noted previously - a more expansive definition of 'theatre in the community' as well as adopting a more flexible approach to companies in the telephone interviews. In strategic terms, this would (as it effectively did) open up grounds for the inclusion of a wide range of companies I knew to be operating in the London area. The 'British Performing Arts Year Book' - in allowing for a deeper understanding of the different strands that make up the amalgam 'community theatre' - further strengthened confidence in the viability of pursuing such companies as 'community theatre'. I was mindful, however, of the possible political, social or commercial motivations behind their classifications as such (Hoggart et al, 2002: 186). I thus decided not to label companies as 'community theatre' myself, but instead gave respondents the space to describe their company's own particular relationship to 'community'. This proved to be very successful, with respondents often eager to discuss their perceptions of 'community theatre', as well as to locate ideas of 'community' within their various projects.

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12 The general outline of the (reformulated) telephone interview was as follows:

Yvonne: Hello, my name is Yvonne Robinson, and I am a research student looking at the different ways that community is defined in performance and practice. I understand that 'community' in terms of theatre can cover a variety of performance types and practices. For example, 'reminiscence theatre' (work with the elderly); 'youth theatre' (work with the youth); and 'ethnic theatre' (work with different cultures)... What ways (if any) would you say [name of theatre company] might be seen to work with ideas of community?

Respondent: -----.

Yvonne: Would it be possible to come and talk to you in more depth about some of these ideas?
3.3.2 The Interview Population

The companies treated in this thesis can all - to varying degrees and in different ways - be understood as 'theatre in the community'/'community theatre' (please see box 3.2 for a description of the companies interviewed). However, I have no doubt that many of the companies I have included would disagree with my classification of them as such. In fact, only a handful of the companies I interviewed actually referred to themselves as 'community theatre', which they defined in the traditional sense: namely, theatre which has a predetermined aim of creating community, often through an emphasis on local/personal experience and also the inclusion of professional and community artists in performance. The majority of companies I have included therefore, do not constitute 'theatre in the community' in the canonical sense of the term but invest heavily in more intricate notions of community, access and involvement.

I have assumed the liabilities of this unconventional grouping for two reasons: because it enables a critical search for 'community' in contrasting types of performance and practices, and because it allows the concept of 'community theatre' to be problematically read and thus generalisations about the art-form, not so easily assumed. The inclusion of groups such as Nitro, Tamasha, Talawa and Theatre Technis, etc, which I have classified as 'community' because there is a sharing of cultural preference, can also be seen as a strategic move. Generally identified as 'ethnic' or 'minority' theatre, this classification has had the adverse effect of keeping them outside of the cultural mainstream; my goal in contextualising them within the project - and as such, in explicating their very particular and unique projects of (community) theatre - is to demonstrate their significance to the wider theatrical community. Whilst the majority of the companies I have chosen to

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13 These companies were Arc Theatre Ensemble, London Bubble and Kettle of Fish.
interview do not constitute ‘community theatre’ in the traditional sense, they are united, I believe, in their emphasis on live performance and its ability to reinforce processes of democracy. The table below (box 3.2), summarises the details regarding the interviews.

**Box 3.2: ‘Community Theatre Companies Interviewed’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Based in</th>
<th>Policy (^{14})</th>
<th>Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Afro International</td>
<td>North London</td>
<td>To provide education and entertainment in theatre and community arts. Aim at promoting a greater sense of awareness, understanding and appreciation of African culture.</td>
<td>July 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Age Exchange</td>
<td>S.E London</td>
<td>To entertain, inform, record, stimulate and create a greater understanding between young and old through exploring living memory.</td>
<td>June 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 All Change</td>
<td>North London</td>
<td>To use 'arts' for a purpose - as a tool for regeneration, seeing local people as the principal asset through which renewal can be achieved.</td>
<td>September 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Arc Theatre Ensemble</td>
<td>Barking</td>
<td>To create new educational theatre and tour to schools and non-traditional venues.</td>
<td>July 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Besht Tellers</td>
<td>North London</td>
<td>To open up the Jewish world to both Jewish and general audiences, and creatively challenge all cultural discrimination and prejudice.</td>
<td>February 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Half Moon Young People’s Theatre</td>
<td>East London</td>
<td>To challenge, educate and stimulate young people through theatre which reflects their interests, aspirations and lives.</td>
<td>August 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Hoxton Hall</td>
<td>North London</td>
<td>To produce exciting, innovative work in a range of art forms in the belief that such work inspires people to develop their creative potential.</td>
<td>August 2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{14}\) Company policies have been gathered from ‘The British Performing Arts Year Book’ (1999/2000), and literature supplied by the companies themselves.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Company</th>
<th>Based in</th>
<th>Policy</th>
<th>Interviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kettle of Fish</td>
<td>S.E London</td>
<td>To use theatre and arts to enrich lives, particularly for people who are disadvantaged, and to challenge and educate on matters of social concern.</td>
<td>July 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Bubble</td>
<td>S.E London</td>
<td>To attract and involve a wide range of audiences and participants, particularly those experiencing theatre for the first time, using inventive and unpredictable events that reflect the diversity of our city and its people.</td>
<td>February 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nitro</td>
<td>North London</td>
<td>To use music theatre as a means of encouraging Black audiences into the theatre.</td>
<td>August 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outside Edge</td>
<td>South London</td>
<td>Through drama, we aim to assist audiences with their efforts to live a chemical free life.</td>
<td>June 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proteus</td>
<td>Basingstoke</td>
<td>To take professional theatre (characterised by commitment to new writing/work, education and internationalism) to established performance areas and non-theatre venues in Hampshire and adjacent counties.</td>
<td>June 2001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spare Tyre</td>
<td>S.E London</td>
<td>To promote access to the arts in order that people may experience the positive benefits of self-expression and creativity.</td>
<td>July 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strathcona</td>
<td>S.E London</td>
<td>To promote a positive view of disability and challenge preconceptions and prejudices through theatre work with the learning disabled.</td>
<td>August 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talawa</td>
<td>East Central London</td>
<td>To use Black culture and experience to further enrich British theatre and to enlarge theatre audiences from the Black community.</td>
<td>August 2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tamasha</td>
<td>North London</td>
<td>To reflect, through theatre, the Asian experience, with stories drawn from the Asian community- both in Britain and the Indian subcontinent.</td>
<td>July 2000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I conducted interviews with twenty community theatre companies in London between February 2000 and June 2001. I chose to employ open-ended questions so as not to structure the debate (the interview schedule can be found in Appendix I), and instead enable those interviewed to define their experiences freely and in a manner with which they felt comfortable. I mostly
spoke with directors, managers, community outreach workers, or those I
knew to have 'intimate' knowledge of the workings of a particular company,
and in most instances, simply used the questions as a guide to ensure the
smooth progression of the interview. In time, however, and with increased
confidence, I was able to enter into a discussion with respondents through a
free-flow of conversation. Having said this, I would always begin an interview
in the same way: I would briefly reiterate the nature of my research, before
going on to provide respondents with an outline of the issues I wished to
explore. Once respondents confirmed that all was understood and were
happy to proceed, I would ask the initial question.

Each interview took between forty-five minutes to an hour and the majority of
these were conducted in the company office space - which in two cases, also
happened to be interviewees' homes. On these occasions our conversations
covered a wide range of topics pertaining to the experiences of (community)
theatre companies, all of which related to the ways in which notions of
'community' were used to ground specific objectives in various projects.
From the stories of the companies I interviewed, it was also clear that
interviewees held ambivalent feelings towards the term 'community theatre'.
Whilst they were keen to stress the value of the art-form by outlining
distinctions between 'community' and 'established' theatre - e.g., its emphasis
on equality as opposed to hierarchy - they maintained that the more negative
connotations of the term obscured the myriad of other (positive) identities
they share with 'mainstream' theatre. So on the one hand, respondents - by
emphasising the ontological distinctions between 'community' and
'established' theatre - actively set themselves in a relationship of ideological

\[15\] I always ensured interviews were carried out in places of the interviewee's choice.
opposition to the mainstream. On the other hand - and largely in response to the relatively low status that community theatre occupies in relation to the mainstream - respondents aligned their practices with those of established theatre. These are issues I address in the chapters that follow, especially in chapter four, where I seek to both exploit and deconstruct the relationship between 'community' and 'mainstream' theatre, in my discussion of the various kinds of (community) theatre companies operating in Britain today.

What the interviews yielded in analysis was a recurrent sense of the inescapable diversity of community theatre (see box 3.3, which outlines the five main types of community theatre I have identified - a more in-depth discussion of the different types of groups will follow in chapter four). There are, for instance traditional (theatre in the community) companies like the London Bubble, Kettle of Fish, Proteus and Arc Theatre Ensemble, who emphasise taking theatre to communities, especially non-traditional theatregoers. There are also companies whose theatres are based in a particular locality and who see as an important part of their work the generation of an awareness and celebration of a geographically local culture - i.e., Half Moon Young People’s Theatre and Theatre Royal Stratford East. Then there are group specific companies like Age Exchange, Spare Tyre, Strathcona and Outside Edge, who are concerned with ‘specific’ groups of people; and culturally specific companies like Tamasha, Nitro, Besht Tellers, Afro International, Tara Arts, Talawa and Teatro Technis, where there is a sharing of ‘cultural preference’. Finally, there are more broad-based arts companies like All Change, Theatre Venture and Hoxton Hall, who use a full spectrum of art-forms to fulfil community development aims. It follows that the interviews, as well as providing biographical insights into respondents, became a vehicle for deriving a more nuanced understanding of the different types of community theatre companies operating in Britain today.

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16 The fact that interviewees themselves frequently made this connection was particularly interesting for me. This was because I had been forewarned in my PhD workshop not to 'spur on' debate about the competition that exists between 'alternative' and 'mainstream' theatre.
forms of community theatre that exist in London. Since I was also interested in getting closer to the 'lived experiences' of community theatre companies, and as such, in examining their socio-spatial constitution, I resolved to research a number of companies more ethnographically, through periods of voluntary participation in their activities.

Box 3.3: ‘Five main types of ‘community theatre’ identified’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Community Theatre</th>
<th>Company</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Taking Theatre to Communities | London Bubble  
Kettle of Fish  
Proteus  
Arc Theatre Ensemble |
| Based In A Particular Locality | Half Moon Young People’s Theatre  
Theatre Royal Stratford East |
| Group Specific            | Age Exchange  
Spare Tyre  
Strathcona  
Outside Edge |
| Culturally Specific       | Tamasha  
Nitro  
Besht Tellers  
Afro International  
Tara Arts  
Talawa  
Theatro Technis |
| Broad Based Arts          | All Change  
Theatre Venture  
Hoxton Hall |

3.4 Constructing the Case Studies

3.4.1 Choosing the Case Studies

From the sample of twenty companies and based on information obtained from the interviews, I selected three\(^17\) groups for more in-depth investigation: these were the 'London Bubble', 'Outside Edge' and 'Tamasha'. My choice of case studies was largely determined by three considerations: how fully does the company engage the idea(s) of ‘community’; how far does its practice

\(^17\) This number was deemed most sensible in terms of my limited time span and the financial constraints of the project.
allow me to answer the research questions; and how different is the story each company has to tell? In fact, the cases I have chosen to draw on are quite different from each other, but are linked, I think, by an emphasis on increased access to, and - to varying degrees - participation in, the theatre. Further still, in arguing their positions in different ways, each case lays a claim to how (community) theatre should be thought of, how it should be represented - in short, how they believe they should be perceived in the 'popular imaginary'.

Each of the cases engages with a different notion of community. The first - the London Bubble - is a paradoxically illuminating case. In representing more traditional ideas of community theatre, they can also be seen to transform mythic notions of community - i.e., nostalgic hankerings after a shared past that never actually existed. I was particularly interested in the company's emphasis on taking theatre 'to' communities. In the second case, a rather more infrequent utilisation of community theatre is encountered in the 'group specific' theatre of Outside Edge. Through a focus on how the company uses theatre to assist addicts/alcoholics with their efforts to live a chemical free life, I became interested in the way such performance produces forms of communality. Issues of community are raised to another level in the third case - Tamasha - where ideas of 'cultural specificity' are translated into notions of boundedness and limitation. Within this context, I was also keen to explore the way Tamasha can be seen as theatre that emerges 'out' of the community. In all cases, I was interested in the complexity of the concept of community and how each company expressed it.

3.4.2 Doing Ethnography

This section is based on the ethnographic research - and specifically, the participant observation - I carried out with the London Bubble, Outside Edge
and Tamasha, between June 2000 and July 2001. In each case, I attended the
rehearsals and performances of all productions. In addition, I carried out
library and archival research on the company and collected scripts, reviews
etc, to inform my contextual practices.

3.4.2.1 London Bubble

My ethnographic research with the Bubble was conducted between June and
August 2000, where I participated in the rehearsals and performances of the
company's professional production Gilgamesh; and also during November
2000 and July 2001, where I was actively involved in the Bubble Adult Drama
(BAD) group's project Pandora. Access to the Bubble was negotiated via
Trisha Lee, the company's Participatory Projects Director, whom I
interviewed in February 2000. Trish proved to be an invaluable authority on
the Bubble and a decisive 'gate keeper', advising me - of the dates and times
of sessions, interesting people I should talk to, and particular events of
significance occurring at the Bubble - on both my involvement in Gilgamesh
and Pandora.

'Gilgamesh'

In the two weeks preceding rehearsals for Gilgamesh, I had been required -
as were all participants - to fill out a form confirming a) if I wished to be a part
of the 'choir' or the 'chorus'; and b) my availability for rehearsals and
performances. If you were a part of the 'choir', this meant that you would not
be acting, but instead singing along to the music composed for Gilgamesh. If
you were a part of the 'chorus', you would be acting in Gilgamesh - in most
instances, appearing on the 'stage' periodically to comment on the action.
Confirmation of whether a participant wished to be a part of the choir or the
chorus determined the group you would be assigned to, as well as the days
you would be required to rehearse. Most of the participants were those
already known to the Bubble, either through participation in previous productions, in one of the Bubble's participatory groups, or by simply living in the area. Rehearsals at the Bubble ran from 7 - 9pm on a Tuesday. However, nearer to the time of the first scheduled performances, rehearsals were also conducted on an additional day in the week, as well as weekends. From the outset I decided that I would only attend rehearsals for the group I was allocated to. This is because I wanted to avoid unnecessary 'outsider gazing'. In fact, for the most part, I remained intentionally vague about my research around other participants, as I did not want to make anyone feel uncomfortable. Having said this, from time to time and mostly in general conversation, my status was questioned.

'Overt or Covert Participation?'
Walking back to the Bubble building I struck up conversation with three other participants: two men and a woman. The woman of group, like one of the men, was of South Asian appearance; the remaining participant was 'White'. As we chatted away about the evening's rehearsal, it became glaringly obvious that I was the only one in the group that had not participated in any of the Bubble's previous productions. The individuals I spoke with were all known to each other, but felt sure that they had never come across my face before. I became silent in nervous anticipation of the question I knew would be posed next. Was I to reveal to these participants the fact that they were all under scrutiny; or was I to conceal the true nature of my research?
Research Diary 28.06.00

Previous research on community theatre has largely involved covert ethnographic procedures (see for example Mattingly, 2001). Reflecting on Mattingly's sense of awkwardness when a student asks, "why are you here? who asked you to come to this school?"(p.446), I knew, however, that 'coming out' about my 'researcher' status would not be easy. In terms of the initial encounter I had with participants, the idea of concealing my identity has always made me feel uneasy. At the same time, however, I did not want to bring attention to myself or indeed lose trust I had not yet had time to build up with other members. In the end, I decided I would explain my position plainly
to the participants: 'I was a student researching theatre in the community - but I was also personally interested in theatre too'.

I fitted into my role as a 'regular' participant relatively easily. To begin with, this was aided by the fact that all participants in Gilgamesh could be seen embarking on a new experience - as newcomers themselves and in other respects. My uneasiness was thus shared with others and was probably construed as 'beginners nerves'. As I increasingly participated in rehearsals, I maintained this role, I think by representing myself in a way that would minimize my outsider status. It follows that, coming from an acting background that was geared largely towards success in the mainstream, I had developed many preconceived notions about the aesthetic capabilities of community theatre. I did not, however, allow such perceptions to cloud my conduct with participants. So, for example, when asked if I would have considered participating in a community theatre show prior to my own research, I remained evasive in my answers. I stressed the fact that the research had opened up contacts I would continue to keep; and also relayed to participants how being involved in the show was proving to be a very positive experience.

For the most part, staff and participants saw me as 'a student who was keen to know more about community theatre'. They revealed this to me in their

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18 'Gilgamesh' was the first professional production that would bring all of the Bubble's participatory groups together. For example the 'Byte size' group (eleven to fourteen year olds); the 'Megabytes' (fourteen to twenty-four year olds); and the 'Bubble Adult Drama' group.
keenness to find out how the work was progressing. In fact, a lot of people in the organisation, and notably Peth, the director, felt that community theatre was under-researched. Peth was therefore very enthusiastic towards research, but at the same time, was careful not to indulge me with preferential treatment.

Rehearsals always followed the same format:

7.00 - 7.45  Warm-up and voice work

7.45 - 8.15  Movement (physical)

8.15 - 9.00  Script work

I participated in the above activities as a 'participant observer', and in this way could be seen to emphasise participation and social interaction over observing (Hoggart et al, 2002: 257). I recorded my time spent in rehearsals in a research diary, and nearly always at home or away from the Bubble's premises. On rare occasions I jotted (quick) notes down secretly - when, for example, I wanted to remind myself of the names of participants or of specific incidents. Also, the night before a rehearsal, I would plan my area(s) of focus for the next day. This meant that I was able to fully concentrate on a particular issue - e.g., how the director interacted with participants - without having to worry about focussing on anything else. Moreover, my diary was comprised of very specific notes which detailed the issues I was interested in, which further allowed for less painful analysis. In the day-to-day ethnographic encounters of participants, I discovered real friendships. This, I realise is one of the inherent strengths of participant observation - i.e., that it allows for a degree of openness in social relationships - a strength, which in the context of
theatre in the community, was greatly reinforced. However, as mentioned in section 3.2, the level of intimacy attained from being with a group over an extended period of time, is such that researchers can become detached from their role. Whilst I was mindful of this fact, there were undoubtedly moments when the lines between Yvonne the researcher and Yvonne the person became blurred.

In terms of the performances of Gilgamesh, I chose to alternate full participation with observation. As a 'participant', my role ranged from 'person of the forest', to 'narrator' and 'props person', and I was directly involved in scenes two, three and four. As an 'audience member', I carried out conversational interviewing with the other spectators, and recorded observations in my diary when I got home.

Box 3.4: 'Performances of Gilgamesh'

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Capacity</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>26.07.00</td>
<td>Mayflower Gardens</td>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>7.30 10.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27.07.00</td>
<td>Mayflower Gardens</td>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>7.30 10.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02.08.00</td>
<td>Deptford Park</td>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>7.30 10.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.08.00</td>
<td>Deptford Park</td>
<td>Audience member</td>
<td>7.30 10.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.08.00</td>
<td>Oxleas Woods</td>
<td>Performer</td>
<td>7.30 10.00pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.08.00</td>
<td>Oxleas Woods</td>
<td>Audience member</td>
<td>7.30 10.00pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

'Pandora'

An offshoot of Gilgamesh, Pandora was the creation of the participatory side of the Bubble, and more specifically, the Bubble Adult Drama (BAD) group. In late October 2000, letters were sent to participants (18 and over) advising them of three participatory options they could pursue: the first, the 'BAD'

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19 See chapter five, p.182, for the diary extract entitled 'Sophie'.

20 Contacts had been largely obtained through the Bubble's mailing list and also individual enquiries about the organisation.
group was suitable for new members or participants that had been involved in one previous production at the Bubble. This group would be involved in the devising and performance of Pandora - a project about the lives of vampires and immortality. The second option, the 'Pandora Choir', would be open to adults and young people over the age of fifteen, and would involve work on the music and songs for Pandora with an experienced musical director. The final option, the 'Self-Start' group would be open to more experienced members who had been in at least two Bubble shows. This group would be involved in the production, direction and publication of their own piece of theatre. As Gilgamesh had been the only production I had taken part in (and my singing voice leaves a lot to be desired), the most relevant group for me to conduct my ethnographic research in was the BAD group.

I carried out research of the BAD group between November 2000 and July 2001, in the Bubble’s rehearsal room on Elephant Lane. Once again, access to this group was negotiated via Trish, who was, very appropriately, also the Participatory Projects Director.  As with most of the participants in Gilgamesh, most of the members in BAD lived in close proximity to the Bubble and/or had taken part in previous shows. All expressed a keen interest in acting. Unlike Gilgamesh, however, participation in the BAD group was not free. Waged participants paid thirty pounds a term and unwaged participants, fifteen pounds (I fell into the latter category). The devising of Pandora took place every Wednesday, from 7.30pm to 10pm. The session would begin with warm-up exercises, and generally follow with improvisational work. In this context, I carried out overt participant observation of the group’s activities. I say overt, because two participants already knew my status through my participation in Gilgamesh. Having said this, however, my capacity in the BAD

\[21\text{ This meant, by the time of ‘Pandora’ I had already managed to develop a rapport with Trish, which meant that she was pretty much conversant with the themes I was interested in, as well as the kinds of skills I had to offer the group.} \]

\[22\text{ Script work for ‘Pandora’ was built into the workshop programme after 3 - 4 months.} \]
group was never questioned and so, while it was never my intention to conceal my researcher status from the rest of the group, I decided that I would only reveal it if I were directly questioned.\textsuperscript{23} In this way, I recorded all my notes in a field diary at home, and usually the morning after a BAD session. Participation in the BAD group was ideal, as it gave me access to further observe the every-day contexts of the Bubble that were completely different from those observed in the professional producing side of the company. This distinction proved critical to my understanding of the different forms of 'community' that were made in the practice and performances of the Bubble. I should state, however, that I did not participate in any of the performances of Pandora. This was because performance dates were continuously rescheduled, and in the end, went far beyond the time designated for field research.\textsuperscript{24} I did take part in the 'show of work', however - a collage of Pandora's main themes, which participants performed - in June 2001. Here, my role shifted from participant - i.e., direct involvement in scene 1 of the show of work - to observer - i.e., observation as audience member of the scenes in which I was not involved.

3.4.2.2 Outside Edge

In almost complete contrast to the environment afforded by the Bubble, the context in which I conducted participant observation with Outside Edge was extremely intense. The ethnographies carried out with this company began in September 2000 and ended in December of that same year. In similar circumstances to that of the Bubble, I was able to gain access to the company via an interview - in June 2000 - which I conducted with artistic director, Phil.

\textsuperscript{23} That my status in the group was never questioned is almost entirely linked to the high turnover of participants in BAD, an issue I discuss in section 5.4.

\textsuperscript{24} I further address this issue, along with the problems and challenges encountered by the BAD group in section 5.4.
Fox. In the two months preceding this interview, Phil telephoned to advise me of a project Outside Edge were about to embark on. At the core of this project was the idea that the experiences of addicts/alcoholics could be used in the creation of a play. The initiative was being spearheaded by the London Arts and would consist of four one-day workshops based around the relationships of drug addicts/alcoholics and their non-addict/alcoholic partners, and also a one-day 'feed-back' session. At first, I had treated Phil's invitation as a means to better acquaint myself with the practical work of the company - a taster, if you like, of things to come. I had no plans for this contact to become an ethnographic research exercise; however, after the first day of the workshop, I realised the experience it afforded would be of considerable import to the research.

As Dowler (2001: 153) contends, "participant observers can never fully shed their status as an outsider", but in the context of Outside Edge's workshops, my status as a participant observer was problematic for several reasons. First, in electing to carry out covert participation, I was (initially) identified by the other participants as a 'natural' member. Yet as an 'authentic' member, I would be expected to aid in the construction of a play that centred on the lives of addicts/alcoholics. Unlike (most) of the other participants involved, however, I did not come from a background of addiction, and as such found myself in less than an expert position to talk about the subject. Second, and leading in from this first point, the (authentic) participants would have been quite justified in objecting to my presence, which, to all intents and purposes, could have been perceived as voyeuristic. It follows that my fear of making participants feel uncomfortable at the Bubble was greatly intensified in my

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25 Phil Fox had agreed to be interviewed after our first contact at the forum theatre workshop.

26 The workshops ran from Monday 4th September to Thursday 8th September 2000. They began at 10.30am and ended at 4.30pm.

27 There were two other participants involved who had not been directly affected by addiction.
participation with Outside Edge. And it was precisely because of this fear - of alienating others as well as myself - that I decided to conceal my real identity from the group. I chose instead, to be partly truthful with participants, and thus told them that I was a student with an interest in the theatre. I did not ever make out that I was 'coming from' the same place as the participants - i.e., that I had ever been chemically dependant; I instead attempted to make indirect links through confiding in them about individuals I personally knew to be battling with addiction. Whilst my actions - i.e., choosing not to disclose my true capacity to the group and instead representing myself as a student with an interest in theatre - were well intended, I recognise that this disclosure could have backfired in my face.

The fact that this did not happen, and that instead, participants reacted positively to my presence, was largely due to three factors. First, from the offset, Phü made it clear that everyone involved in the workshop were there on his invitation. This, I feel, went some way in legitimating my own presence. Second, I feel my own personal attributes went some way in helping participants warm to me. For example, the fact that I was considerably younger than most of the participants, meant that many of them believed they were teaching me invaluable lessons. Also, many of the participants commented on my 'clean' status being a 'breath of fresh air', because nearly all the people they associate with, have, at some stage of their lives, been affected by addiction. In this context, issues of confidentiality were of extreme importance. Highly intimate and personal details of participants were being disclosed on a day-to-day basis. For this reason, all recording of field notes took place away from the workshop, and special care was taken to maintain the anonymity of all the participants involved. Because the participants taking part in the workshop were in an extremely vulnerable position, I was also

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28 Whilst, in chapter six, I have attempted to write through the research diary in the first person, and as if events are actually taking place at the time of writing, this was not the case. This was largely for dramatic effect and was based on recordings taken away from the workshop environment.
concerned to keep a degree of professionalism and distance in the inevitable friendships made. The second phase of research with Outside Edge took place during the rehearsals for Harry and Susie. After the four-day workshop, the director suggested that I come to a few of the rehearsals, 'to see how the actors/actresses got to grips with the material of the play'. This phase would not prove of monumental significance to the research, but it would provide, amongst other things, insight into the performance styles (if any) the director adhered to. Furthermore, strategically, attendance of the rehearsals would also go some way in securing my access to the performances, which were of particular import to the research.

Rehearsals were conducted in 'The Munster' studio, between 10am to 6pm, and from Monday to Friday for two weeks exactly (week beginning Monday 16th October 2000). I generally attended rehearsals three days a week - on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday. During this time, my participation ranged from 'complete observer' to participant observer. As a complete observer, I recorded my notes openly in the field diary. Neither the director nor the actors/actresses seemed at all perturbed by my presence. In fact, the director commented that the actors/actresses were stimulated to work harder. As a participant observer, I was able to assist the director with various exercises. For example, on one occasion, Phil asked me to improvise a scene with Michelle, who was playing Susie, the main protagonist of Harry and Susie. In the enactment, I would play Susie’s mother, a character that is mentioned but never actually appears in the piece. My aim was to provide Michelle with further contextual evidence of where Susie was ‘coming from’, her background and upbringing, etc. So, in character and using words and actions I believed Susie’s mother would use, I spoke of significant events and

29 Rehearsals were conducted with a professional cast of four actors and actresses.

30 This is because I was particularly interested in the forms of communality produced through Outside Edge’s performances.
experiences in the young Susie’s life, which would have a direct bearing on the person she had grown up to be. This was to provide Michelle with the context she needed to make her own performance stronger, and hence, more believable.

In terms of the performances of Harry and Susie, I carried out complete observation. The majority of the performances I attended took place in rehabilitation centres - environments which, under normal circumstances, I would not have been able to access. Phil became the gatekeeper of these institutions, and he facilitated my access to them. I documented all observations in a field diary immediately after a performance, in the privacy of my car. I also carried out conversational interviews with the spectators. However, I was reluctant to initiate such conversations as Phil had allowed me enter rehab centres as a member of Outside Edge. I did not want my speaking to the spectators to be misconstrued in any way because under ‘normal’ circumstances I would have been seen as both an unnecessary and obtrusive intruder.

**Box 3.5: ‘Performances of Harry and Susie Get Married?’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Venue</th>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>08.11.00</td>
<td>St Lukes</td>
<td>1st Stage alcohol/drug residential programme</td>
<td>10am - 12pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.11.00</td>
<td>Springfield Hospital</td>
<td>Drug detox and residential programme</td>
<td>10.30am - 12pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15.11.00</td>
<td>Thurston House</td>
<td>2nd Stage residential rehabilitation service</td>
<td>10am - 12pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.11.00</td>
<td>Hammersmith and Fulham Centre</td>
<td>Community centre</td>
<td>7.30pm 9.30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.11.00</td>
<td>Clem Atlee Community centre</td>
<td>Community centre</td>
<td>7.30pm 9.30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>01.12.00</td>
<td>Lewis Suite</td>
<td>Conference hall</td>
<td>3.00pm 5.00pm</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.2.3 Tamasha

Unlike the London Bubble or Outside Edge, where I already knew the people I worked closely with (Trisha Lee and Phil Fox), my initial meeting with the artistic director of Tamasha, Kristine Landon-Smith, was on the first day of rehearsals for Fourteen Songs. Access to this company had been negotiated via Tamasha's administrator, Cathy Bourne, who had confirmed with Kristine my request to 'observe' the rehearsals and performances of the company's latest production. Full participant observation in this community theatre setting was not an option as Tamasha utilise 'professional' actors/actresses in all of its productions. In this way, the actors and actresses would have gone through the rigours of castings and auditions - i.e., the professional channels - to demonstrate their suitability for the production. Also, the fact that Tamasha is an Asian theatre company meant that my own ethnicity prevented me from pursuing the role of full participant observer in Fourteen Songs. I thus pursued the role of 'complete observer' as this was deemed the most appropriate option. I carried out my ethnographic research with this company between January and February 2001. Rehearsals ran from Monday 24th January to Friday 9th February 2001, and were conducted in The National Youth Theatre's Rehearsal Spaces, which are situated on the Holloway road. I arranged with Kristine that I would attend rehearsals on a Monday, Wednesday and Friday, from 10.30am to 3.30pm over the three weeks they were conducted. I took copious notes and conducted conversational interviews with the actors/actresses involved in the production. The more interesting elements of rehearsal were often moments in which I was able to talk freely with cast members.

Lunch times were the most favourable periods in which to talk to cast members. There was never any need for 'ice breakers' as Kristine had given me a big introduction on the first day of rehearsals. From here on, and often in break times, cast members themselves would initiate conversation. On
one occasion, I was invited to join cast members Meneka, Shiv, Sameena, Rehan and Ajay for lunch at the local pub. Conversations ranged from the difficulties that prevented ‘Asian’ and ‘Black’ actors/actresses from getting parts, to Asian actors/actresses that were doing well or, as often seemed to be the case, were doing badly. The former of the two topics seemed to spark much passion in Meneka, whose enthusiasm for almost anything she spoke of could never fail to draw you in. “In any case”, she blurted out, “almost everything is written for the blonde and blue eyed!” The rest of the group nodded with approval, yet they had appeared less angry than weary. Shiv, who always had a warm expression in his eyes that was straight forward and reassuring, explained: “That’s why you can never put all your eggs in one basket”. Clearly none of the actors/actresses that surrounded me had done this. For Meneka was also a writer and director and was in the midst of making her own film; Ajay and Rehan both directed; Sameena was putting her hand to writing, and the list goes on. I asked Meneka if when she wrote a play, she did so with a particular kind of person in mind – and her answer: “Well, I don’t know about anyone else, but I write with me in mind!” I laughed. In an ordinary way however, I had felt sad as I realised that for many actors and actresses, this was the only way they could fulfil their life’s ambition. I was to learn shortly, however, that the actors/actresses had enormous respect for those Asian actors/actresses who had made acting their sole focus. This, Sameena made clear, excluded those that accepted ‘supporting artist roles’ and had ever been perceived as ‘extras’. To my confusion, I discovered that this was less than ideal.

Research Diary 29.01.01

In the second phase of research with Tamasha, I documented five of the final performances and carried out conversational interviewing with spectators. This also included the ‘Press Night’ performance of Fourteen Songs (16.02.01), a special performance for members of the press, theatre critics, and - as it happened to be - well known actors/actresses from the screen. Preceding this performance was a party for the cast members - a ‘cast party’ - which, apart from other things, was an opportunity for the actors/actresses to mingle with well known directors and make ‘polite’ conversation with the critics. This was also a chance for me to make contacts and talk to people about my research.31

31 I thank Kieran Meeka, Chief Features Sub-Editor of a free daily London paper, for sending me his review of Fourteen Songs.
3.5 Positioning in the Research Process

In this section, I would like to reflect on the ways in which my own positioning as a ‘Black’ woman, an actress and a consumer of knowledge has had an impact on the research process.

3.5.1 Ethnic and Gender Positionings

I suspect that both my gender and my race went some way in alleviating my status as an outsider in all three of the community theatre settings. In the context of the Bubble, I believe this was largely due to the affinity staff workers felt they had with me because of community theatre’s own marginal positioning within international and national arts hierarchies. In this way, members of the Bubble were seen to liken community theatre’s peripheral status, to the social and cultural marginalisation of minorities from the mainstream of British society. My colour, then, and hence my own ‘minority’ status, was seen to endow me with qualities that connected me to the company. This, coupled with my positioning as a woman, further allowed workers to perceive me in a non-threatening way.

In terms of Outside Edge, my status as a ‘Black’ woman provided opportunities for dialogue, which, whilst clearly deriving from my positioning

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32 Comparatively, though, my gender positioning had less to play in this research than did my ethnicity or the fact that I am also an actress.
as an outsider, seemed also to reinforce my status as an 'insider'. This was witnessed, for example, when the director relayed to me the fact that he had always known he wanted the main protagonist (Susie), 'to be Black'. As we spoke about the low proportion of 'Black' women in rehabilitation centres, the director seemed keen to draw on my own positioning as a woman within the 'Black community', to gain insight on issues that were not accessible to him as a 'White' male. Similarly, and in regards to Tamasha, I am fairly certain that I was privy to information that would not have been disclosed to me had members not positioned me - my ethnicity - as part of their (wider) community. An example of this can be seen in the many conversations I had with the cast of Fourteen Songs, concerning the shortage of good, solid parts for 'Black' and 'Asian' artists. However, I was made to appreciate the limitations of my own ethnicity when an Asian researcher from 'Blue Peter' came into rehearsals, and was able to converse with actors/actresses about, for example, the latest 'Asian' hotspots, or 'Asian' icons they had grown up with as children. Whilst I understood that the researcher and the cast's shared ethnicity did not necessarily reflect a congruity of interests, this seemed to challenge my own insider positioning.

3.5.2 My Identity as an Actress

I have been employed as an actress for an acting agency for the past five years. I believe this, as well as the fact that I regularly attend an acting class at The Academy School of Acting (Whitechapel), has had a profound effect on the way I have been 'read' in the various community theatre settings, as well as the way I have conducted this research. Unlike Nagar (2000), or Mattingly (2001), my experience as an actress has allowed me to participate 'fully' in (most of) the day-to-day activities of the case studies (with the exception of Tamasha). In respect to Outside Edge, I was able to participate in warm-up games and activities, which, for the most part, would have proved extremely challenging for my colleagues in academia. This is because most of the
exercises were of a highly intimate nature, and often involved participants intruding in the 'personal spaces' of other members. I have had extensive experience in these kinds of exercises, through my practical training at the acting school and during the course of a 'Theatre studies' 'A' level. In these contexts, much emphasis is placed on actors/actresses losing their inhibitions, being free in the body - as opposed to being rigid and self-conscious - and in self-expression. I further believe that my actress status enabled me to become a part of the 'acting communities' of both the Bubble and Outside Edge. Whilst my own background differed significantly from those I researched in the latter research setting, and to a lesser extent from the former, the fact that I, like the other participants shared an interest in acting, alleviated my status as an outsider. In this way, I was not viewed as a 'different player', or given special attention by staff or the other participants.

My positioning as an actress has also enabled me to give something back to the communities I have researched. This has ranged from being actively involved in creation of Harry and Susie, to assisting the director with improvisational work in the rehearsal phase, to making suggestions as to the effectiveness of various scenes in Fourteen Songs, and taking part in the producing and devising of Gilgamesh and Pandora. My actress status was particularly important in the context of Pandora, as participation in the BAD group commanded a particular level of experience. Moreover, I was able to analyse the differences between the professional and the participatory side of the company and particularly, the different forms of community produced in these contexts.

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33 See section 6.2 for a discussion of the warm-up activities.
3.5.3 My Positioning as a Consumer of Knowledge

In this study, I have had to address the implications of my own positioning as a researcher within the research process. Whilst, as mentioned above, my gender, race and my own complicit positioning as an actress have helped to minimise my status as an outsider, I am aware that I was also read as an 'academic' by some of the participants in this study. In some instances, this proved to be a 'positive reading', as when the young participants in Gilgamesh continuously asked me what my topic of interest was for a nights performance, always holding out for a time that they would be the key features of the research. On other occasions, however, my status was evaluated less favourably. This was seen nearing the end of performances for Gilgamesh, where many of the older participants had become disgruntled by the fact that some members had elected to take time away from actually performing to watch the production. According to the older members, it had not been fair that some participants were seen to be 'taking nights off' whilst others 'worked right through'. It was therefore inevitable that my researcher status and as such, the fact that I had chosen to alternate performing in and observing Gilgamesh, would mean that some participants would harbour ill feelings towards me. When I returned to my 'performing role' in Gilgamesh, the feelings of animosity that had existed between participants proved to be short lived. Whilst seeming cautious to begin with, the participants appeared to have been genuinely pleased to have me back on board. In hindsight, I believe that although at some point certain members may have borne a little resentment towards me, they remained friendly and were quite willing to work with me.\[^{34}\]

\[^{34}\] This was seen, for example, when I struggled to carry one of the props for Gilgamesh over to another scene, and Eric, who had been one of the most vocal in his annoyance, offered to help me.
At other times during the research process, I became aware that my positioning as a researcher had a direct bearing on the way people behaved, as the following extract from the research diary reveals:

**‘Talking for the benefit of the Researcher’**

It is the last session before half term. Things have become very disjointed and participants seem never to know what to expect from week to week. This has largely been because Trish has been away working on a ‘theatre in education’ project, and Emma, who is temporarily replacing Trish, seems to constantly change the direction of sessions. But things are also unsettled because of the high turn over of BAD members - faces appear to change every week. Today, however, Trish was back, and as a consequence needed updating on the various things the group had been working on. The problem was, nobody seemed to know. Later in the session, we split into groups to work on scenes from *Pandora*, only to be further confronted by the fact that no one knew what they should be doing. One participant in particular who had been experiencing BAD for the first time, was intimidated by the obvious lack of clarity and left the session half way through. Trish seemed a little embarrassed by this and more so, I suspect, because I had been a witness to the whole incident. Looking in no particular direction, Trish said: "These are the kinds of things that happen in community theatre, when you’re so pushed for time and are unable to meet the needs of people individually. I’ll give him a ring later on this evening to make sure he’s alright...". As Trish trailed off our eyes met and I knew at once the words had been for my benefit, or at least, should I say, for Yvonne the researcher’s benefit.

Research Diary 04.04.01

Within the various research contexts, and particularly in relation to the Bubble and Outside Edge, I was also conscious that, whilst there were social, cultural and economic differences between the participants and myself, I should not look any different from them. In this way, care was always taken to dress casually and wear the kinds of clothes that people my age were wearing in the groups. I was also aware whenever talking to participants, that there needed to be a critical reflexive stance on my part, so that conversations did not seem contrived or staged, or only coincided with my own rationale. Whilst, then, I endeavoured at all stages of the research, to be aware of what I was trying to achieve, I also appreciated the unequal balance of power that
existed between myself and those under research. It follows that I also had to confront my own biases and interests in possibly 'distorting' the data.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the ethnographic research methodology – particularly integrating participant observation and semi-structured interviewing – offered the best means of answering the research questions within a framework that engaged with the embodied practices of community theatre companies. This chapter has also explored the reflexive negotiation of my own positioning within the research process and in representing the experiences of those I researched. Whilst recognising the problems associated with participant observation, I have also sought to reveal that with suitable caution and self-reflection, this method allowed me to construct data in the forms of my own feelings and emotions. Further still, participant observation enabled me to confront my own biases, as well as to dismantle the dangerous and misleading assumptions about community theatre. The empirical work which follows, examines the ways in which community theatre companies map notions of community through performance and practice. The first of such empirical chapters, ‘Community Theatre/Theatre in the Community’, provides an introduction to community theatre companies in London.
Chapter Four

Community Theatre/Theatre in the Community

4.1 Introduction

In this, the first of four substantial analytical chapters of the thesis, I examine contemporary practices of community theatre/theatre in the community. I have stated in chapter two that I consider current approaches to community theatre to be less radical than that espoused by The Combination and the earlier community theatre movement. An aim of this chapter, however, is to show how the former emphasis on 'participation' and making theatre relevant to the communities it serves, has remained key to modern day practices of theatre in the community. Companies that can be said to practice theatre in the community today choose to represent themselves in a variety of ways, and are also complexly multifaceted in their understandings of 'community' (see again box 3.3, which summarises the five main types of community theatre identified). They are united, I believe, in their emphasis on 'involvement', 'access' and 'inclusion', notions which I shall go on to argue also have profound effects on the artistic status of community theatre. This is because, in being largely concerned with the socio-cultural empowerment of its participants - i.e., that participants are involved and are included in, and also have access to theatre - community theatre is often portrayed as being unconcerned with aesthetics.

The perceived 'artistic benightedness' of theatre in the community further fuels criticisms that it is unprofessional, second-rate, and lacking in artistic credibility. Wary of such portrayals of an 'amateur theatre', however, this chapter seeks to make apparent the diversity that exists amongst companies practising theatre in the community, and as such, the conflicting nature of
views that reject a 'community theatre aesthetic'. A related aim is to explore the ideological tension between 'community' and 'established' theatre, and the way their relationship is commonly expressed in competitive and exclusive terms. What follows, then, is a critical comparison of approaches to theatre in the community. Whilst, however, I seek to connect such practice to wider debates about community theatre, I am concerned with the spatialities of theatre in the community - the forms of community/communality that emerge through (and the forms of participation, inclusion and exclusion that characterise) community theatre practice.

Drawing on in-depth interviews with community theatre workers in London, the main objective of this chapter is to introduce the reader to contemporary practices of theatre in the community. The chapter is built round the key questions: What exactly constitutes community theatre? How is its interrelationship with communities established? Does catering for the community mean that companies cannot be professional, or that they are constricted in their artistic outlook? Why is community theatre deemed to be less important than established theatre? The chapter consists of one main section entitled "Contemporary Practices of Community Theatre: community, text and performance". This section has been divided into five key subsections, each of which outlines a particular approach to theatre in the community. I begin each section by firstly providing background/historical information about the companies in question. After outlining the aims and objectives of the organisations, I go on to comment more explicitly on the approach to 'community' adopted by the companies. My interrogation of community theatre begins with The Half Moon Young People's Theatre and Theatre Royal Stratford East, section 4.2.1. Here, the notion of 'community' being interrogated is that defined by place or locality. In the second instance, section 4.2.2, the community theatres I shall be debating - namely, Kettle of
Fish, Proteus and Arc Theatre Ensemble - are concerned with taking theatre to communities. In section 4.2.3, I examine the culturally specific theatres of Nitro, Besht Tellers, Afro International, Tara Arts, Talawa and Theatro Technis. The group specific theatres of Age Exchange, Spare Tyre and Strathcona are explored in section 4.2.4. And finally, in section 4.2.5, I look at broad-based arts companies like All Change, Hoxton Hall and Theatre Venture. Charting the practices of community theatre in this way enables me to rethink the dualisms exposed in chapter two - harmony//contestation, representation//presentation, community theatre//established theatre - in more substantive ways.

4.2 Contemporary Practices of Community Theatre: community, text and performance.

4.2.1 Theatres Based in a Particular Locality: The Half Moon Young People's Theatre and Theatre Royal Stratford East.

This section begins our analysis of current approaches to 'community' in theatre by exploring theatres that are based in a particular locality. Both the Half Moon Young People's Theatre (Half Moon) and Theatre Royal Stratford East (Stratford East) demonstrate an approach to 'community' that is defined by place or locality. In this, they can be seen to endorse a keen awareness of the locality in which they are based (East London) to generate collective dialogue amongst the distinct and diverging communities who live there. It is an approach to 'community' that can be interpreted as ideal and essential in its outlook. This is because it rests on the assumption that people will have a shared understanding and experience of place and also positions place as a source of collective dialogue.
This romantic idea of place is further reinforced by the fact that both the Half Moon and Stratford East are based in areas of East London which are extremely deprived. Raymond Williams (1976) has shown how a sense of 'community', of cohesion and unity is often fostered through the sharing of adversity, whether defined in terms of poverty, unemployment or crime, etc. It follows that, because the Half Moon and Stratford East are situated in particularly deprived areas of East London and in their place-based approaches to community can be seen to promote a 'single sense of place', they are interesting cases for examining the inclusive and coherent nature of traditional understandings of community. In this section, however, I want to question these possibilities by exploring how the celebration of 'difference' and 'multiplicity' in the work of the Half Moon and Stratford East, invokes a notion of community that is dynamically progressive too.

My starting point will be to provide a brief history of the Half Moon and Stratford East and a background of the community theatre workers interviewed. Whilst giving the reader a sense of the governing ethos behind the companies' approaches to community theatre, the aim here is to discuss the interviewees' original reasons for becoming community theatre workers. I argue that the concern to involve and include people in theatre has meant that community theatre workers are often perceived as being unconcerned with aesthetics. In the second part of this section, therefore, I consider how much artistic satisfaction can be derived from community theatre. In so doing I also discuss theatre in the community's ideological positioning to established theatre. In the final part of the section, I examine more explicitly the approaches to community theatre adopted by the Half Moon and Stratford East. I argue that deployment of the term 'community' in the companies' theatres is regressive and dynamic, and thus emphasise how their place-
based approach is constitutive of both 'local' and 'global' imaginings of community (Massey, 1994).

4.2.1.1 Theatres based in a Particular Locality: A Background of the Half Moon and Stratford East.

As theatres based in a particular locality, the Half Moon and Stratford East are concerned to promote an awareness and appreciation of their home boroughs. The Half Moon, which is situated in Limehouse in the borough of Tower Hamlets, focuses on a particular ‘community of interest’ group - the young. The company seeks to inform, challenge and shape the artistic potential of young people and sees theatre as being capable of providing opportunities and platforms for them. Originally formed in the 1970s, the Half Moon was envisioned and guided by the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA). At this time, the company specialised in training programmes and participatory theatre in education for schools. The emphasis on participation as well as the need for a popular theatre that entertains its audiences remain central objectives to the present company.

The history of Stratford East dates back to 1884, when the theatre operated as a permanent playhouse. In 1953, and under the direction of Joan Littlewood, the Theatre Workshop developed an approach to theatre, which attempted to involve both actors/actresses and audiences. This company was also involved in local activities with young people, and actively encouraged the development of theatrical skills through ‘imaginative game play’. Philip Hedley, the current Artistic Director of Stratford East in Newham, maintains that theatre, "...through the subject matter of the shows, the kind of artists performing in them, the style of the publicity and marketing, the prices [and] the kind of welcome the theatre gives through the education and training
policies" (1995: 8), should be made accessible to all sections of the community.

It follows that the 'popular' and 'inclusive' initiatives of former years, remain powerful influences on both the Half Moon and Stratford East's approaches to community theatre. This was also evident from the conversations I had with the Senior Education Officer at the Half Moon, Liselle Terret, and with the Community Liaison Officer at Stratford East, Sunda Kangesgan. Interestingly, their backgrounds and reasons for becoming community theatre workers - like the majority of community theatre workers I spoke to - also displayed this sense of wanting to 'do something for people', or the 'community at large'. Liselle, for example, had been immersed in community arts work years before coming to the Half Moon. Crucially, she cited the desire to work a) outside of formal institutions like schools; b) with people who were disadvantaged or excluded in some way; and c) with an inclusive form of theatre, as the initial impulses for her becoming a community theatre worker (personal interview: 17.08.00). Sunda expressed similar sentiments:

"...I personally wanted to do things that benefited local people... Theatre Royal is always at the doorstep to help the local community... to get involved in the struggles of the local community, like the refugee asylum seekers". ¹

The image of the community theatre worker constructed from the above could be, as it often is, interpreted as someone more concerned with using theatre to serve people, rather than vice-versa; someone not so much concerned with the artistic integrity of their work as with the people involved. This is a common criticism of community theatre (i.e., that it has low artistic standards and amateurish theatre). However, it is a criticism that Liselle and

¹ Interview - Sunda Kangesgan: Community Liaison Officer, Stratford East, 2000.
Sunda have argued is inaccurate and misleading, and the next section explores this question of aesthetic quality more fully.

4.2.1.2 Questions of Artistic and Professional Conduct: The Half Moon and Stratford East’s Ideological Positioning to Established Theatre

The Half Moon and Stratford East address themselves to their respective communities, using theatre to develop potential and creative ambitions. In this context, creative ability is not a prerequisite to an involvement in theatre. Yet, as both of the community theatre workers I spoke to have argued, neither is this indicative of community theatre’s disinterestedness in aesthetics or the attainment of (high) professional standards. As mentioned previously, one of the main reasons the term ‘community theatre’ invokes problematic images of a theatre that is second-rate and constrained in its artistic outlook, is because it is assumed that community theatre workers are concerned only with the socio-cultural empowerment of participants. Another reason for antagonism towards ‘community theatre’ stems from its identification with ‘community’ - or, as in the case of the Half Moon, ‘youth’ - which also conjures up the same derogative images, which have been noted above. Such images, however, bear little or no resemblance to the picture Liselle and Sunda boldly construct of theatre in the community:

“...Every thing we do, is quality art-work and of a very high standard. That’s something that we keep ...whether you’ve never done drama before, it’s about quality... [A]nd that means that the tutors are trained, the tutors know the Half Moon ethos. You know, in terms of that quality ... we would never have more than twenty-five in a group, you know, we never have one tutor working on their own we always have two tutors”.

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2 Interview - Liselle Terret: Senior Education and Youth Officer, Half Moon, 2000.
Far from being constrained in their artistic outlook, Liselle and Sunda described the work of the Half Moon and Stratford East as innovative and of 'a very high standard'. In this way, Sunda defined the artistic quality of shows at Stratford East in relation to those staged in more established theatre venues. He similarly contrasted what he saw as mainstream ideals of professionalism - i.e., having 'big stars' (for example, from 'East Enders') that top the bill - with a more 'collective' notion of being professional. Critically, for Sunda, this means doing things 'effectively' - being a 'good' actor/actress, director, marketer, and also being able to share these skills with other people:

"And that means besides being an actor, doing your job as normal, you come back and do theatre workshops with the people, school kids, you give back something..."  

An important consequence of thinking about the artistic and professional conduct of the Half Moon and Stratford East, is that it highlights the very different agendas of 'community' and 'established' theatre. This will be a recurring theme throughout the chapter, but what I want to emphasis here, is the sense in which theatre in the community represents a - small, but real - challenge to the established form. Liselle and Sunda were unashamedly boastful of the Half Moon and Stratford East's ability to reach diverse audiences. Yet it is clear, on very little reflection that established theatre fails to do the same. Such achievement rests heavily on notions of outreach, inclusion, participation, and the presumed equivalence of prospective communities, subjects I will examine in the final section when I look more closely at the approaches to 'community' espoused by the Half Moon and Stratford East.

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3 Interview - Sunda Kangesgan.
In this final section I examine the Half Moon and Stratford East's approaches to community theatre more closely. I shall be particularly concerned with how, on the one hand, the companies construct 'local' imaginings of 'community' by generating an awareness of a 'local geographic culture'. In this sense, I argue that the Half Moon and Stratford East seek to integrate the people of East London. On the other hand, I shall be concerned with how the companies can, at the same time, be seen to utilise more 'global' imaginings of 'community' by celebrating the cultural diversity of East London. In this respect I argue that the Half Moon and Stratford East's practice has an affirmative quality, which is embracing of 'difference' and 'multiplicity'. I shall frame this discussion within the broader working practices of the Half Moon and Stratford East, and in so doing, also highlight the policies and principles that define the companies' approaches to theatre in the community.

At the core of the Half Moon and Stratford East's approaches to theatre in the community is the desire to include people in theatre. For the Half Moon, it is the creative experiences of 'young people'\(^4\) living in close proximity to their Limehouse base that become the focus of company practice. Young people - like the majority of people - living in Tower Hamlets face significant economic and social exclusion, which makes them especially vulnerable to issues concerned with the politics of representation. As Liselle articulated to me in interview, the word 'youth' has become synonymous with the 'drug addiction' and 'crime' that also characterises the area. It follows that part of the Half Moon's project of community theatre, whilst deconstructing the facts and myths that surround young people, is to use theatre as a vehicle for young

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\(^4\) 'Young people' in this context, is taken to refer to those between eight to twenty-five years of age.
people to challenge negative stereotypes. An equivalent aim of the Half Moon is to use theatre making to give young people the skills and platforms to articulate their own views. Similarly, for Stratford East, theatre becomes a means of getting involved in the struggles of the local community. According to Sunda, Stratford East forms a 'continuous loop' with its community, and as such draws ideas from, and stages shows which connect back to, the community. Crucially, both the Half Moon and Stratford East see the relationship between themselves and their respective communities as one of mutual appreciation and unity. It is a relationship they endorse by generating an awareness of a local geographic culture and, at the same time, celebrating the cultural diversity of East London. What are the ways, then, that the companies do this?

One of the ways the community theatre workers I spoke to engendered the sense of a local geographic culture was through an emphasis on the deprivation that characterised their local boroughs. Both LiseUe and Sunda described their immediate local environments as being characteristically shaped by socio-economic hardships. In this way, they cited the common experience of deprivation and the sharing of a particular set of focal concerns - i.e., unemployment and the fear of crime - as reinforcing a sense of 'belonging', as Liselle articulates: "...Poverty is the main issue for people in this borough...so, you know, it becomes a thing that is inherent...that...kind of binds people together, and binds them to a place...".\(^5\) Community, in this context is based on a 'unity of struggles', a 'unity of poverty', and refers to what Raymond Williams has termed "...the mutuality of the oppressed..."(Williams, quoted in Evans, 1994: 107). It is, without doubt, a romantic conception of community, one which drives the sense of a localised

\(^5\) Interview - Liselle Terret.
and collective culture.

The physical proximity of the Half Moon and Stratford East's theatres further generates an impression of a local, collective identity. This is because, in being close to their respective communities, both the Half Moon and Stratford East are able to forge relationships with, and become intimately involved in the 'struggles' of the local people. Moreover, these relationships are understood as being based on, and driven by an awareness of the local geographic area. As Liselle explained to me: "...[Y]esterday I had this mum come in with her two children that live on the estate round the corner, and she's known we've been here for years but has always been a bit nervous - because it's a 'theatre' - to come in. But she did come in, because we are around the corner, she eventually came in...". In seeking to integrate the people of East London, to mobilise local sentiment and foster community identity, the Half Moon and Stratford East can be seen promoting an appreciation of a local geographic culture.

At the same time, however, the companies utilise more 'global' constructions of community by celebrating the cultural diversity of East London. It follows that both Liselle and Sunda cited the diverse ethnic makeup of their boroughs as being an important factor in their projects of community theatre. This is because the physicalisation of difference - the presence of different cultures and therefore inevitability of disputes, frictions and unrest - reinforces the Half Moon and Stratford East's objectives to help such communities 'move forward together'. They achieve this through the staging of productions about East London, productions by East Londoners, and productions which reflect the

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6 Interview - Liselle Terret.
different cultures of the people in the area.

Another way in which the Half Moon and Stratford East are able to connect with and thus celebrate the communities who live in their boroughs, is through their ‘outreach work’. Sunda told me, ‘‘...we positively target different groups...’’, which, he explained entailed going to community and day-care centres, schools and onto the streets of East London to let people know about the different events happening at Stratford East. Different groups are further encouraged to come to theatre through the Half Moon and Stratford East’s pricing of tickets, as Sunda explained: ‘‘...[I]t’s two pounds for students or the unemployed...if people can’t afford it we let them in for free...’’.  

In conclusion to this section, embedded in the Half Moon and Stratford East’s practice is an inherent contradiction between the idealisation of place and an idea of place that simultaneously celebrates heterogeneity. By generating an awareness of the locality and culture in which they practice, people become rooted to place and believe in their commonalities. Yet in celebrating the difference, multiplicity and pluralism of their home boroughs, the Half Moon and Stratford East encourage people to move forward together, and in this, invoke a notion of community that is dynamic and which has been re-imagined as global.

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7 Interview - Sunda Kangesgan.

8 Interview - Sunda Kangesgan.
4.2.2 Taking Theatre to Communities: Kettle of Fish, Arc Theatre Ensemble and Proteus

As we have seen in section 4.2.1, the Half Moon and Stratford East demonstrate an approach to community theatre that centres on place, and more specifically, place as understood through the notion of 'belonging'. Whilst a sense of belonging to a particular place also plays a part in the application of community theatre proposed by Kettle of Fish (KOFT), Arc Theatre Ensemble (Arc Ensemble), and Proteus, it is the related concepts of inclusion, involvement and participation that are of particular import to this section. This is because, in taking theatre to communities, KOFT, Arc Ensemble and Proteus place these concepts at the forefront of their community theatre practice. In chapter five, I discuss the nature of this approach in relation to the practical endeavours of the London Bubble. I shall be particularly interested in the experience of participation and the implications of this for the making of 'community' in practice.

My aims in this section are more modest: while seeking to outline the basics of KOFT, Arc Ensemble and Proteus' approaches to community theatre, a further aim is to show how the companies are conversant with issues related to both 'theatre' and 'performance'. As I argued in section 2.2.3, because community theatre is understood as 'theatre' engaging in a relationship with 'community', it cannot be seen as merely (ordinary) theatre. Whilst, then, theatre in the community displays some of the key characteristics of 'theatre' - for example, text-based performances that take place in theatre buildings - 'community theatre' also displays features that correspond with its identification with 'community'. For example, performance that occurs away from theatre buildings and which commonly seeks to problematise the traditional divide between actors/actresses and spectators. These are not
The main objective of this section is to show how KOFT, Arc Ensemble and Proteus engage with tropes of theatre and performance. The section is divided into two parts. In the first part I discuss the ways in which KOFT, Arc Ensemble and Proteus follow the ideological project of 'theatre' by adhering to a 'text-based' approach to performance. I consider how, in the case of KOFT and Arc Ensemble, theatre is based on 'narratives from experiences' - i.e., the experience of place or local, personal experience. In the case of Proteus, I focus on the way theatre is developed through an emphasis on 'new writing'. In the second part of the section, I argue that the notion of 'performance' is an equally important part of KOFT, Arc Ensemble and Proteus' work, by exploring how the companies 'take theatre to communities', and thus also to less conventional theatrical spaces. I also comment on the forms of inclusion, involvement and participation that are reinforced through the approach. I begin with a history of KOFT, Arc Ensemble and Proteus.

KOFT, a community theatre company based in New Cross, was founded in January 1991 by Marc and Karen Cavallini, who remain sole members of the company. Originally, Marc and Karen sought to provide a platform and arena for their work, which they had intended, from the offset to be in service to the community. As I shall go on to reveal, the desire to use theatre to benefit the community - i.e., that is accessible in terms of affordability and which also has resonance to people - has remained paramount to the company. Similarly, the objectives of Arc Ensemble, a Barking based community theatre company founded in 1984, are - and have always been - to use theatre to engage, inspire and transform the lives of local people. For these reasons, the company is concerned to use a form of theatre that is accessible, and is
capable of exploring key issues in an urban, multicultural society. The history of Proteus can be traced back to 1981, when the company had strong links with the Haymarket Theatre, now a stone's throw away from its present location in Basingstoke. The company has always been dedicated to new writing which is wide reaching and which also has the potential to motivate and allow communities to acquire new ways of perceiving the world. The following two sections attempt to specify the principle characteristics of KOFT, Arc Ensemble and Proteus' approaches to community theatre. They are based on the interviews conducted with the Artistic Director of KOFT, Marc Cavallini; the Projects Manager of Arc Ensemble, Lüa Yankervich; and the Associate Director of Proteus, Deborah Wilding.

4.2.2.1 A Text-Based Approach to Performance: Theatre from Experience and New Writing

This section begins with a discussion of the way in which local and personal stories are made into theatre in the work of KOFT and Arc Ensemble, and then goes on to discuss how Proteus uses new writing as the narrative basis for its plays. In so doing it argues that the companies can be seen to be following the ideological project of 'theatre'. For KOFT and Arc Ensemble, community theatre is a powerful means of 'voicing public concerns' and 'providing platforms' for local issues to be heard. In this way, the companies consider theatre to be interrelated with, as opposed to being displaced by, 'real life local stories'. It is a conception of theatre in the community, then, that engages with notions of 'empowerment', 'ownership' and 'democracy' concepts which in this context also suggest the 'championing' of communities.

This is certainly the impression community theatre workers Marc Cavalini and Lila Yankervich constructed when describing the local and social issues of the
communities with which they work as forming the central and foundational role in the creation of theatre. Following Lila: "...[A]ll of our community plays have taken real life local stories and then dramatised them in a different form". This can also be observed in KOFT’s community plays Bacon Pudding and Velvet Cushions and Dead Secrets. The former play took as its subject the historical events surrounding the building of Greenwich Borough Hall. In this way, it celebrated the local area of Greenwich, was based on the local history of Greenwich and drew on community participants from Greenwich and the neighbouring borough of Lewisham. The latter play, Dead Secrets, was also rooted in local historical experiences. Written as an allegory for the cuts made to Greenwich Community College, the play drew on a large cast of local people to recreate the true story of a murder that took place in Greenwich in 1871:

"...[I]t was all about trial by media and trial by community, ... because the guy who most people thought was guilty was an epileptic. Most people thought that was demonization at the time and it was their inability to understand where he was coming from. The girl that was killed [Jane Clousen] was very brutally murdered...She was pregnant at the time...It really stirred up the community".

Marc told me that the community participants found listening to the story of Jane Clousen’s murder deeply painful. However, they found shaping the story into theatre an enjoyable experience and still, performing in it ‘truly amazing’. The perceivable value of Dead Secrets, as articulated to me by Marc, seemed to rest on the fact that it provided a potent voice for local people - in this instance, voicing the right for the people of Greenwich to have a community education. It further allowed people to come to terms with

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aspects of their common pasts while working to construct and shape their futures. Moreover, Marc also commented on the 'community' aspect of community plays, and the fact that "...you create community whilst you're doing it [and]...establish links across age groups, across gender groups, across ethnic groups, across social backgrounds and across different areas of South East London". For Lila, the community play also serves to boost confidence and empower people in practical ways:

"...[T]he individuals who take part, you can see the increased levels of self esteem, the confidence. And all of this has the knock on effect that they might be better at a job interview, because they might be better at public speaking...".

It follows that both KOFT and Arc Ensemble place stories of local and historical significance, and which have personal resonance with local people, at the heart of their theatre practice. Crucial to these companies, as Lila commented, "...is finding out what the issues are for local people and using them in a theatrical way". For Proteus, an intimate knowledge of its community, and thus being able to give that community what they want, is also vital. However, in this instance, being 'mindful' of and 'responsive' to the community involves delivering them 'new' work. As community theatre worker Deborah Wilding pointed out, however, "...to get people in to see new writing, you have to give them some sort of a hook. It needs to be some subject that they recognise, something they feel familiar with". In terms of 'Hampshire audiences', who, according to Deborah are conservative with 'a

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11 Interview - Marc Cavallini.
12 Interview - Lila Yankervich.
13 Interview - Lila Yankervich.
14 Interview - Deborah Wilding: Associate Director, Proteus, 2001.
capital C', do not like nudity and have an aversion to swearing, this means that new writing tends to take the form of 'family entertainment':

"...the sort of thing you can take your six year old and your granny to and you can all sit down and enjoy it".  

Critically, for Proteus, being aware of what its audience wants does not mean that new writing cannot be 'challenging', 'exciting', or 'innovative'. Break Through for example, a community project written by a professional writer, explored the everyday challenges faced by the mentally ill and physically disabled. The play toured to residential homes, day centres and "...anywhere that there [wa]s a community of people with either physical disabilities or mental health problems". In terms of Proteus' professional productions, the need to be attuned to the idiosyncrasies of Hampshire audiences becomes ever more relevant. Thus, the company found that staging little known European works that had no relevance to the people they were being shown to was of no benefit to themselves or to the community. Instead the narrative basis for work commissioned by Proteus must have 'family' appeal. It follows that past shows that have been produced by the company include Sherlock’s Excellent Adventure, which looked at the exploits of Sherlock Holmes, Charlie, which explored the early life of Charlie Chaplin, and 3 Musketeers! An extract from the flyer of 3 Musketeers! captures the familial form of light hearted entertainment Proteus adheres to:

"From the team that produced last season’s tour of ‘Sherlock’s Excellent Adventure’, comes a new family version of the classic...adventures of...the fearless musketeers".

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15 Interview - Deborah Wilding.
16 Interview - Deborah Wilding.
All three of the community theatre companies discussed in this section explicate a ‘text-based’ approach to performance. In this way the ideological background of their practice has been informed and shaped by ‘theatre’. From this perspective, KOFT and Arc Ensemble’s community plays - which derive from local and personal experience - and Proteus' productions - which are based on new writing - rely on the ‘written-word’ for the conveyance of their meaning. They further depend on actors/actresses to ‘share’ - with audiences - such meaning, and a theatrical space in which to represent and transform meaning. The next section explores some of the performance spaces KOFT, Arc Ensemble and Proteus take such ‘theatre’ to. It argues that in ‘taking theatre to communities’ the companies also reinforce the project of ‘performance’.

4.2.2.2 From Theatre to Performance: Taking Theatre to Non Traditional Performance Venues

For KOFT, Arc Ensemble and Proteus, taking theatre to non-traditional theatre venues forms part of their mission to breach the divide between theatre and those traditionally unseen in established theatre spaces. As artistic director, Marc Cavalini articulated to me, this means ‘going to places where people feel comfortable’ and ‘trying to meet people where they are’. KOFT’s production of Dead Secrets for example, was staged at Greenwich Community Hall; Arc Ensemble’s Kicking Out, a play about racism in football, played in - amongst other non-theatre venues - a sports centre; and Proteus' 3 Musketeers! toured to village halls and community centres. According to Marc, taking theatre to where people are means that a wider spectrum of people gain access to theatre. Theatre is at once made accessible and inclusive. Yet it is not merely meeting people in places that they are familiar with that paves the way to a greater involvement in theatre. Changing the
relationship between the actors/actresses and spectators further allows for a more genuine and collaborative experience of theatre:

"We try to blur the lines so the audience actually feels they are a part of the play...We do try to shock people,...surprise them, by having actors sit next to them and try to talk to them, by swinging huge spotlights down the aisle...".18

This kind of experimentation can be linked back to The Combination's performance of The Wasps, which was 'taken to' a job centre. Audiences are integrated into and are engaged by, rather than detached from, the action. For Proteus, an engagement in theatre also comes from the fact that audiences belong to the communities in which a show is being staged. 'Community', in this context is about, as Deborah commented, "...grannies sitting down next to the grandchildren and mak[ing] it a community event as in the whole community".19 Critically, for Deborah, the 'whole community' refers to "everybody ...not the 'Black' community, or the disabled community, or the thirty to forty year olds... but everybody, interacting together".20 Whilst, however, Proteus attracts a diversity of people in terms of age, gender and physical ability, the company's quest to attract the 'whole community' - which in Deborah's terms, also included people from different ethnic minorities - can never truly be realised, as Deborah herself acknowledged:

"Sadly, Basingstoke just doesn't have an ethnic population. And in fact, much of Hampshire doesn't, which is very, very strange. We don't do any work specifically aimed at an ethnic minority - again,

18 Interview - Marc Cavallini.
19 Interview - Deborah Wilding.
20 Interview - Deborah Wilding.
that’s not to say that that wouldn’t happen if there was a need. But sort of, where we are, it doesn’t really arise”.  

In touring to urban and rural areas within Basingstoke and Dean; North and East Hampshire, however, Proteus is still able to forge real connections with its communities. Deborah articulated this to me and described feeling personally connected to people on the many occasions the company has been invited back to perform in a village hall or community centre:

“They remember you, even actors that have worked for the company before, they’ll remember and they’ll want to know what you’ve been up to in the mean time”.

In taking theatre to communities, KOFT, Arc Ensemble and Proteus can be seen to be manifesting tropes of ‘performance’. In this, they espouse an approach to theatre in the community, which in ‘physically’ taking theatre to where people are also involves the act of ‘doing’. The companies further challenge traditional conventions of theatre by providing democratic performing spaces and by breaking the divide between stage and spectator.

4.2.3 Culturally Specific Theatres: Afro International, Besht Tellers, Nitro, Talawa, Tara Arts and Theatro Technis.

The contemporary approaches to theatre in the community outlined so far, all - to varying degrees and in different ways - invest in a notion of empowerment through involvement in theatre. In this sense, companies like Stratford East, KOFT and Proteus, etc, have remained quite close to the original ethos of The Combination. While the companies in this section have also drawn inspiration from The Combination - and particularly its emphasis

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21 Interview - Deborah Wilding.

22 Interview - Deborah Wilding.
on making theatre responsive and responsible to the communities it serves - they utilise a notion of community that can be interpreted quite differently from those previously outlined. As such, they can be understood as 'community theatre' because they are theatres emerging 'out' of the community - community, in the sense that there is a sharing of culture, custom or place of origin. Tamasha is an exemplary company in this respect and one whose work I shall focus on in chapter seven. My focus in this section, however, will be on Afro International, Besht Tellers, Nitro, Talawa, Tara Arts and Theatro Technis, and how they, as 'ethnic' theatres, position themselves in relation to the wider established theatrical community. Turner (1999) refers to these companies as culturally specific theatres, though as we shall see, specificities between them can differ widely.

My aim in this section is to show how culturally specific companies who integrate into the cultural mainstream encounter relatively fewer problems than those who remain outside of the wider established theatrical community. The section is divided into two parts. The first section focuses on the way Besht Tellers, Nitro and Talawa endeavour to bring their work into mainstream theatrical activity and, in the process are perceived - and perceive themselves - as professional and efficient. I also examine how the companies grapple with the prospect of being associated with community theatre. The second section looks at the ethnic theatres of Afro International, Tara Arts and Theatro Technis, and argues that by not seeking integration into the cultural mainstream, these companies struggle for funding, are stigmatised and branded unprofessional and second-rate. I further examine how these companies confront and challenge the dominant form of theatre.
4.2.3.1 A Mainstream Approach to Ethnic Theatre: Besht Tellers, Nitro and Talawa

As theatres emerging out of the 'Jewish' and 'Black' community, Besht Tellers, Nitro and Talawa are concerned with the artistic expression of cultural identity. Besht Tellers, formed in 1991 and based in North London, is committed to staging shows of Jewish interest. Nitro and Talawa, companies established in 1985 and situated in North and East Central London, are concerned to put on work that reflects 'Black' experience and culture. Critically, for all three companies, the focus on their respective communities is not, as the Educational Director of Besht Tellers, Gabrielle Moss told me, 'inward looking'. It is instead an outward looking notion aimed at educating the wider British society about Judaism and 'Black' culture. In this way Besht Tellers, Nitro and Talawa also seek to contribute to and further enrich modern British theatre. They endeavour to do this within an integrationist framework. Talking to Felix Cross and Topher Campbell - Artistic Director and Artistic Director Designate of Nitro and Talawa - for example, they were both keen for Nitro and Talawa to be seen as part of the mainstream centre. According to them, there is a need for more 'Black' people to occupy all levels of professional theatre, from 'directors' and 'playwrights', to 'designers'. Felix and Topher further described the 'complexity', 'heterogeneity' and 'hybridity' of 'Black' identities as ever relevant to the mainstream 'multicultural' programme of theatre they endeavour to present.

Pursuing their integrationist goals has meant that Besht Tellers, Nitro and Talawa's shows are not 'specifically' or 'exclusively' geared towards the 'Black' or 'Jewish' community. Following Gabrielle: "They [the productions] have wider interest and meaning, which is why they have had such success
with a wider audience". This can especially be seen in Talawa's staging of European classics and in its reinterpretations of Shakespearean works. What needs to be stressed in all cases is the desire to raise the status of ethnically diverse work and for it to achieve widespread popularity with average theatre going audiences. Yet in bringing their work into mainstream circles, how effectively do these companies cater for their own communities?

In terms of Besht Tellers, it is the educational side of the company that has more direct links with its community. As Gabrielle told me, "...it [the education department] takes the stylistic content from the professional productions - which is the story telling and the physical theatre, and tries to apply that to non-professional people and just to get them to join in". For Nitro, it is the musical element of its theatre - as music has been shown to be central to 'Black' peoples lives and experiences - that will 'open the door' and allow 'Black' people to come into theatre. Part of Talawa's work is also concerned with bringing 'Black' people into theatre. In this way, the company has an annual four-week summer scheme, in which performances devised by young people are professionally directed. Such endeavours, however, could merely be seen as tokenistic because the time spent with local communities is fleeting and brief. Commenting on the activities of other 'Black' regional theatres, Barnaby King (2000a:133) has interpreted such actions as 'self-serving' because the connections forged with communities allows companies to obtain larger audiences.

As culturally specific companies pursuing integrationist designs, Besht Tellers, Nitro and Talawa have been quite successful. Both Nitro and Talawa

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23 Interview - Gabrielle Moss: Education Director, Besht Tellers, 2000.

24 Interview - Gabrielle Moss.
are fully funded organisations and Besht Tellers has, to date, received funding for every project it has sought financial backing for. Yet the companies' success cannot merely be judged on their ability to obtain funding. It follows that Besht Tellers, Nitro and Talawa are held in very high esteem in established theatrical circles. According to Topher, Talawa has been referred to as 'The National Black Theatre'. The associated images of professionalism, efficiency and excellence are also reinforced. Critically, for the companies, however, being professional, and thus having high aesthetic expectations does not equate to being 'theatre in the community'. Thus, when I asked Gabrielle how she felt about Besht Tellers being thought of as community theatre, she emphasised that there are two sides of the company: the professional side, which she equated with professional 'directors', 'performers', 'writers' and the educational side, which was 'more about 'community'. For Felix, effective theatre practise comes through merging what he sees as the objectives of 'established' and 'community theatre':

“I’m an elitist because I don’t want to spend twenty-five pounds to go and see a show which is rubbish. I want to see brilliance on stage… I’m a Marxist when it comes to what happens in the auditorium, what happens in the seats. I want it to be totally open and accessible to everybody”.

Topher was clearly the most 'edgy' about Talawa being associated with community theatre:

“Talawa has never been thought of as community theatre, absolutely not. It’s always been thought of as a highly professional theatre company... But never community, no”.

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The slight edginess of the above quotation is illustrative of the 'uncomfortable' way the term 'community theatre sits with many theatre companies. However, in discussing Besht Tellers, Nighthro and Talawa primarily in terms of theatre that can be said to have emerged out of particular communities, I offer one way in which they might be conceived. I do not suggest that they will recognise themselves, without reservations in my conceptualisation of them as community theatre, as undoubtedly, some will. As mentioned in previous sections, much of the unwillingness to be associated with the term community theatre stems from the identification of it with 'community' and its associated notions of inclusion and involvement, which in turn lead to ideas of amateurism. I suggest that it is the problematic images of theatre in the community that have spurred companies like Besht Tellers, Nighthro and Talawa to move towards more mainstream objectives. In the next section, I examine culturally specific companies that have not followed integrationist aspirations, and thus consider the implications of this for their theatre practice.

4.2.3.2 A Non-Mainstream Approach to Ethnic Theatre: Afro International, Tara Arts and Theatro Technis

The ethnic theatres of Afro International, Tara Arts (Tara) and Theatro Technis are rooted in specific cultural experiences. Afro International, a company established in 1975 and based in North London, seeks to promote an awareness and appreciation of 'African' culture. Tara, set up in 1976 and situated in South London, is concerned to express the experiences of the 'Kenyan-Asian community'. And Theatro Technis, formed in 1957 and located in Central London, places the 'Cypriot migrant community' at the centre of its theatre practice. It follows that for these companies, emerging from a position of 'difference' and inequality has meant that representing themselves - their communities' aspirations and hopes - in their own creative styles and forms
becomes essential. Moreover, theatre, for Afro International, Tara and Theatro Technis, is only effective when it is enriched by - and enriches - 'real' people and their lives, and when it can be used as an effective tool to solve or work through their communities' 'issues', 'problems' and 'struggles'.

This desire for real and tangible involvement in the issues concerning their communities can be seen to run through the initial impulses behind the formation of each company. For example, Dau Aldulpha, Artistic Director of Afro International, cited the inability of African and Caribbean people to participate in aspects of their 'cultural life' - aspects, which Dau expressed in terms of poetic recitals, drama, music and dance - as the main reason he started Afro International. Jatinder Verma, Artistic Director of Tara, described how the company was formed in response to the racist killing of a young man. Jatinder told me that theatre was to provide a means of trying to 'understand' and 'come to terms with' that murder. Theatro Technis, according to the Artistic Director George Eugenio, was born out the struggles of Cypriot people, of 'women who were isolated' and 'Cypriot children' that were in need of some 'direction'.

It follows that in their singular approach to theatre, Afro International, Tara and Theatro Technis become immersed in the 'poverty', 'illiteracy' and deprivation that characterise their communities. Unlike Talawa, then, who expressed an interest in "...the kind of people who are literate and interested in what [they] are doing as 'Black' people"\textsuperscript{27}, they are concerned with the least represented members of their communities. Following George: "You're a social worker, community worker, the counsellor, the advisor ...But if people come to you and tell you their problems and you try and solve them,

\textsuperscript{27} Interview - Topher Campbell.
you live their lives and you enrich your own life as a creative and useful person". In working at the ‘grass-roots’ level of their communities, however, Afro International, Tara and Theatro Technis have had to ‘struggle’ themselves. Both Tara and Theatro Technis went through a period of ten years without funding and Afro International is not funded at all. In talking to Dau about Afro International’s position in terms of funding, he said: ...[M]y philosophy ... is that as ‘Black’ people we have to do things for ourselves and not delude ourselves by expecting others to perform for us...It’s what you deliver by your own means that will demonstrate your true ability". It is in this context that we can appreciate the ‘separatedness’ of the companies’ approach to theatre, and their desire to express themselves on their own terms.

Such ‘terms’, however - which in all cases effectively amounted to the desire to develop a supportive infrastructure for their communities, to empower them through ‘education’ and an awareness of where they as a ‘people’, are coming from - are not, according to some, conducive to the production of ‘good’, ‘professional’ theatre. As George told me: “...I went to Camden Council in 1969 to ask for a grant, and they said when you reach the standards of the Old Vic come back to us. That was the attitude, you know, and it never occurred to them that we didn’t have the same agenda”. While Besht Tellers, Nitro and Talawa view integration into the mainstream as a positive move, Afro International, Tara and Theatro Technis see this as negating the positive features of their ‘cultural specifism’. The fact that they do not bring their work into the cultural mainstream, however, is in no way, a reflection of

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28 Interview - George Eugenio: Artistic Director, Theatro Technis, 2000.


30 Interview - George Eugenio.
the level of professionalism they bring to their work, or its artistic quality. In fact, in talking to the companies they positioned their theatres in an oppositional relationship to the dominant form. As Jatinder revealed:

“Having worked at the National ... I can say that some of the best plays have been done by ... community theatres”.31

Moreover, Afro International, Tara and Theatro Technis described their ‘great strengths’ as being able to adapt to all levels of their communities:

“...[I]f you study African culture, you will see that a ‘Griyot’, which is supposed to be one of the foremost performers in our culture, can go to a village and will still be able to associate and interact with the ordinary people, the children, and get the desired result. The same Griyot can go to town and meet with other groups and artists, and the results will still be effective. So, my background in the arts enables me to transform myself, to translate from one area to another. I can work with a seven year old child artistically as much as I can work with a sixty year old renowned artist”.32

In the course of this section, I have emphasised how Afro International, Tara and Theatro Technis commit to a non-mainstream approach to theatre. It is also important to stress, however, that in being specifically concerned with their respective communities, this does not mean that they are not concerned to establish a dialogue with ‘other’ cultures. Rather, they see coming to terms with the facts of their own culture, futures and pasts, as central to their community theatre practice.


32 Interview - Dau Aldulpha.
4.2.4 Group Specific Theatres: Age Exchange, Spare Tyre and Strathcona Theatre Company

In this section, I examine the group specific theatres of Age Exchange, Spare Tyre and Strathcona Theatre Company (Strathcona). Like the companies examined in the previous section, they can be seen as community theatre because they engage with particular groups of people. It is an approach to theatre in the community that is also espoused by Outside Edge, discussed in chapter six. However, whereas in that chapter I explore in detail the principal characteristics of 'group specificity', in this section I examine the approach by looking at the question of aesthetics. It follows that Age Exchange, Spare Tyre and Strathcona provide particularly interesting contexts in which to examine the artistic efficacy of community theatre. This is because the particular groups they work with demand a very specific way of working - one in which the process, as opposed to the result, becomes the overriding element. Age Exchange and Spare Tyre, founded in 1989 and 1979 and based in South East London, work with the young and the elderly through reminiscence theatre. And Strathcona, established in 1982 and also based in South East London, create dramas with the learning disabled. In the discussions which follow, I consider the criteria for determining the basis of 'good art'. I begin by focussing on the idea of 'professionalism', before going on to look at the 'process of play making'. Finally, I consider how much 'artistic satisfaction' can be derived from community theatre.

4.2.4.1 Enter the Professional: Age Exchange, Spare Tyre, Strathcona?

If the artistic integrity of community theatre is to be defined by the presence of 'professionally trained actors/actresses', then Age Exchange, Spare Tyre and Strathcona's artistic credibility is virtually non-existent. While the companies -
with the exception of Strathcona - incorporate both professional and community performers in their performances, it is the inclusion of the latter that makes them, and companies like them, susceptible to criticisms of amateurism. Such criticisms are further reinforced by the fact that the majority of the companies' performances occur outside of 'professional' theatre buildings. Having said this, David Saville and Clair Chapman - Artistic Directors of Age Exchange and Spare Tyre - and also Barbara Van Heel - Administrator at Strathcona - persistently stressed the fact that they require their participants/performers to bring a level of commitment to projects. In this, they described the need for participants/performers to 'turn up to' rehearsals, and for them to be on time:

"So just the same demands that any other director would ask of their performers, the same demands are asked of our actors as well. I mean there are some times there is slight compensation for the fact that they have learning disabilities, but really, they are dealt with as professional actors with responsibilities".33

The above quotation serves to illustrate the contradictions between professionalism and 'community' orientated work. As Barbara points out, the company's actors and actresses are given leeway because of their learning disabilities, which, at the crudest level suggests that there needs to be a degree of realism in regards to the 'level' of professionalism that can be attained from (community) performers. While professional actors/actresses are paid, the performers involved in the work of Age Exchange, Spare Tyre and Strathcona are rewarded in terms of 'experience', 'self-confidence' and 'empowerment'. These are subjects I address in the next section where I consider the 'process' of play making.

4.2.4.2 The Process of Play Making

While accepting that an important feature of performance is 'how good it is' and 'how good the actors and actresses are', no performance is successfully received without preparation. That is, the carefully predefined and planned elements of the participatory play making process. As David explained to me: "We don't just do theatre productions, it's stages". According to David, preparation for one of Age Exchange's productions On the River consisted of him spending over six months in 'the field' as it were. During this time, he drafted and sent out adverts; conducted interviews; and collected 'invaluable' life histories. Yet it is not just the groundwork involved in making community theatre productions that is thorough; the working process too, is geared towards the 'empowerment' and 'self-fulfilment' of participants, who - in the course of planning and rehearsing plays - are given the chance to test the limits of their own creativity. This is the sense Clair articulated to me when also describing how, "theatre is a bringing together medium more than anything else".

The 'community' aspect of theatre was garnered in the making of Spare Tyre's production Same Meat Different Gravy. Through this play - which was based on the premise that the 'White' elders' experiences of war were comparable with the experiences of the 'Black' elders arriving in Britain for the first time - participants were able to establish a collective dialogue about the impact of war and immigration. Theatre, in this sense, was also therapeutic, for people were given the chance to revisit parts of their lives and in the process became self empowered. It follows that participants have

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34 Interview - David Saville: Artistic Director, Age Exchange, 2000.
been credited with saying such things as, 'I haven't danced since my husband died'; and 'You've saved my life'. In a similar vein, Strathcona's performers can be seen attaining a sense of worth and achievement by breaking down stereotypes and alerting the wider community to the talents that they, as learning disabled people, possess. A salient theme, then, in the work of Age Exchange, Spare Tyre and Strathcona, is the empowerment of their participants/performers. I would suggest this is a better criterion on which to judge or validate community theatre. The final section, however, seeks to determine whether theatre in the community can or should be judged in artistic terms.

4.2.4.3 But Is It Good Art - Age Exchange, Spare Tyre, Strathcona?

The question of what constitutes good art, and indeed whether community participants can be considered to have artistic talent, persistently reoccurred throughout my interviews with Age Exchange, Spare Tyre and Strathcona. What became illuminating was that their descriptions of artistry seemed often to revolve around ideas of 'truth' and 'authenticity'. Following David:

"...[O]ften ...I find the work particularly with people who are so called ordinary, and supposedly working class, that, when you put them in front of an audience... And they're not acting something they've been given to act, they are sharing something which is from their own lives. There's a wonderful natural quality - I have worked for fifteen years in mainstream theatre, but when I've seen just the story coming straight from the horses mouth, it has a very different kind of feel to it".

This 'natural' quality, however, does not prevent the wider established community from having preconceived ideas about what (community)

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36 Interview - Clair Chapman.
37 Interview - David Saville.
actors/actresses can do. As Barbara told me: "Casting agencies... always take
an actor to act someone with learning disabilities...". The point seems to be
that what community theatre workers call 'good art', is not consistent with
predominant notions of what good art is. For them, the real questions of
theatre have little to do with what others have deemed 'artistic integrity'. This
is not to say, however, that they themselves consider their work to be
'amateur', second-rate, or indeed lacking in artistic strength. Instead they
define their work in other terms. Instead of defining the artistic integrity of
community theatre in terms of the kinds of people participating, we should
look to the working practices of such companies as being a mobilising force
in performance. It is also true, however, that there is a certain richness, a
truth and authenticity in community performances. While David was indeed
undecided as to whether it is 'good art', he could not resist identifying some
moments of their achievements as 'powerful' - moments when a room filled
with elderly people reached 'a peak of artistry'.

4.2.5 Broad Based Arts: All Change, Hoxton Hall and Theatre Venture

This section concludes the chapter's analysis of contemporary approaches to
theatre in the community by exploring more broad-based arts work. It
continues and extends the debates of section 4.2.4 by examining how -
largely as a consequence of community theatre's problematic associations of
amateurism etc, - All Change, Hoxton Hall and Theatre Venture establish a
separatedness from theatre, and have instead chosen to move towards a
fuller appreciation of the arts. In this way, All Change, a company formed in
1985 and based in North London, offer a full spectrum of art, small projects,

38 Interview - Barbara Van Heel.
39 Interview - David Saville.
residencies and consultancy work, in its bid to use the 'arts for a purpose'. Similarly, Hoxton Hall, established in 1975 and also based in North London, seeks to produce exciting and innovative work by using a range of art-forms. And Theatre Venture, founded in 1981 and situated in East London, is committed to creating access to theatre, drama and related arts activity. The argument of the first part of this section pursues the idea that broad-based arts companies have created new names for themselves in order to invite a positive view of their practice. The second part of the section explores how the shift towards broad-based practice, allows for greater involvement and participation in the arts.

4.2.5.1 Broad Based Arts: Moving Away From ‘Community’

The movement of All Change, Hoxton Hall and Theatre Venture to a more broad-based approach to the arts, reveals an antagonism towards (community) theatre. In my conversations with the community ‘arts’ workers, they described to me how it became a disadvantage to call themselves ‘community theatre/arts’ because, as Peter Cload - Finance Director/Music Co-ordinator of Hoxton Hall - explained: "There [is] this idea that there [is] professional work, which is excellent, and there [is] community work, which is not very good, but [keeps] people happy". In Hoxton Hall’s case, the decision to change its name meant that the company would be deemed more favourable by the funding bodies:

“They [the funding bodies] didn’t want to fund ‘Community Arts Centres’. So we now call ourselves - a subtle difference - we now say we do ‘arts in the community’. So the arts sort of came through us, so it sort of suggests a more active, you know...”.

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41 Interview - Peter Cload.
Shabina Aslam, the Associate Director of Theatre Venture betrayed a similar reluctance to the company's associations with (community) theatre:

"[W]e do lots of different things, it's not just theatre, we're a multi-media organisation. We have art workers who work in drama, visual art, music, and video media, right?"\(^{42}\)

While Peter articulated to me that the prevailing 'low' perception of community theatre was 'unfair', something he 'd[idn't] really agree with'; Shabina appeared herself, to have conceptualised (community) theatre as inferior, almost subordinate to broad-based arts work. When I asked Shabina whether 'theatre' could not be seen as a term which encapsulated the activities she describes in the quotation, she replied:

"No they can't. No, no, not at all. Our name is a bit confusing. It's a bit dated. We are called Theatre Venture, but the organisation doesn't just do that, it is a multi-media organisation".\(^{43}\)

Whilst initially taken back by Shabina's vehement response, my attitude changed once I had listened to her very real concerns about making the arts more accessible to communities, and why she felt 'theatre', alone, was incapable of reaching people who have been previously excluded from participating in the arts. The next section examines the potential of the broad-based approach to transcend the boundaries of theatre.

### 4.2.5.2 Broad Based Arts: Transcending the Boundaries of Theatre

For All Change, Hoxton Hall and Theatre Venture, a broad-based approach to performance is very much about using the arts as a means through which

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\(^{42}\) Interview Shabina Aslam: Associate Director, Theatre Venture, 2000.

\(^{43}\) Interview - Shabina Aslam.
individuals can fulfil their creative ambitions and change their lives. Crucially, for these companies, 'theatre' seemed to attract only certain kinds of individuals, as Peter explained:

"...When I first got involved [with] Hoxton Hall... drama was very central, it was sort of ninety percent of the activities...Rightly or wrongly I think drama was still perceived as a sort of, 'White' middle class thing to do, and, you know, this certainly isn't a 'White' middle class area".  

It follows that Hoxton Hall found introducing 'music' and 'painting' attracted different kinds of people. Painting, according to Peter, brought in 'older' people, whilst music had the particular power of crossing trans-cultural boundaries by attracting the 'young', and 'people from different ethnic backgrounds'. Similarly, for All Change, diversification of the company in the 1990s - the company originally produced large-scale community plays - opened up possibilities for getting involved in different areas of 'community' orientated work. Following Melanie Burr, the Artistic Director of All Change:

"...[W]e could work in, obviously in education, which we had been attached closely to before. But it opens up the possibility of health, social services, crime, anti-crime, social housing... Places where communities have been damaged and some healing is needed."  

In the broad-based approach to the arts, there is a more complex understanding of participation. Participation can offer participants the chance for real, 'tangible' involvement in performance, and thus can be a source of positive change. 'Theatre', on the other hand, is seen as substantially limiting the degree to which individuals can participate. As Melanie explained:

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44 Interview - Peter Cload.

"...[T]he key thing was that the West End theatre form, was only - well it's accessible to very few people in the country generally anyway. I mean you can take people from the British Isles and who have been introduced to Shakespeare at school or whatever, but it would seem as alien to them when they are sixteen to be asked to sort of 'enter a scene', and 'face front and project', that would be as alien to them as if you approached a recent Somalia refugee and said, 'would you just try and act this piece'? That wouldn't be their natural means of expression... And then also, it immediately meant that those people had to be physically capable of walking up the six sort of steps onto the stage, say, or down the ramp into the acting area, and move themselves around so that people could say, 'ah yes, you're a police man'. Where as if they had a hobble or they were wheel chair users, or were deaf and they signed, if you used a traditional form, it highlighted their difference...".46

Crucially, for the companies, 'theatre', which Melanie described in terms of 'textual authority' and also of it being 'verbally led', immediately sets up barriers to the inclusion of 'other' people. People who, for example are physically disabled; who do not use English as their first language, or who may be illiterate. In the broad-based approach to arts, however, the 'theatre' imperative is no longer dominant; instead music and a range of different media become the defining features:

"...[B]asically, if you have a set of people that don’t actually know each other, and there may be quite a lot of anger and frustration, it might be better to go with percussion. And have a really able percussion performer and workshop leader, who can go in and suddenly in one hour, he’s got them expressing something that they need to get out of them. And he’s got this disparate group of people able to do something corporately because it's ‘bang bang dish, bang bang dish,’ and they can all see they are doing something harmonious".47

46 Interview - Melanie Burr.
47 Interview - Melanie Burr.
In moving away from theatre to a more broad-based approach to the arts, All Change, Hoxton Hall and Theatre Venture can be seen to work with more complex notions of participation. Participants are not bound by disability or language barriers, but are instead encouraged to embrace the arts on their own terms and in ways that encompass who they are.

Conclusion

The starting point for this chapter is that understandings of community theatre/theatre in the community are complex, and that community theatre companies themselves do not subscribe to a single homogeneity of meaning. I have thus attempted to show how the case for community theatre has been made in fundamentally different ways. In section 4.2.1 I examined the 'place-based' approach to community espoused by the Half Moon Young People's Theatre and Theatre Royal Stratford East. I have argued here that the companies use the locality in which they are based as a fulcrum for local identity. At the same time, I showed how they celebrated the cultural diversity of their boroughs and thus can be seen invoking a notion of community that is progressive and dynamic. In section 4.2.2 I explored how Kettle Of Fish, Arc Theatre Ensemble and Proteus 'take theatre to communities'. I have argued here that the characteristics that performance theorists frequently attribute to 'theatre' and 'performance' can also be identified in the companies' practice. Section 4.2.3 developed a discussion about the 'culturally specific' theatres of Afro International, Besht Tellers, Nitro, Talawa, Tara Arts and Theatre Technis. It emphasised that the ethnic theatres with 'mainstream' objectives face fewer problems than those companies that do not integrate. In an attempt to tackle questions about the aesthetic status of community theatre more explicitly, section 4.2.4 looked at the 'group specific' theatres of Age Exchange, Spare Tyre and Strathcona
Theatre Company. I suggested here, that community theatre should not be exclusively defined in terms of artistic integrity, but as a culturally democratic medium that is capable of mobilising people in powerful ways. The final section, 4.2.5, extended the debates of section 4.2.4 by focusing on the 'broad-based arts' work of All Change, Hoxton Hall and Theatre Venture. In rejecting the argument that these companies are uniquely different from community theatre companies, I have argued that they have been driven to create new names for themselves in a bid to move away from community theatre's problematic image.

At various points in the chapter, I have made links between the earlier practice of The Combination and modern approaches to theatre in the community. I must stress, however, that I consider the relationship as deriving from the company's emphasis on participation, inclusion and accessibility, rather than from its more radical undertakings. Arguably, it is community theatre's commitment to the aforementioned concepts that allows it to compete with established theatre. And I have tried to show how theatre in the community represents a real, if but small, challenge to the established form. In this chapter, then, I have attempted to provide a large-scale map of theatre in the community, in which I have surveyed existing practices of - and introduced the reader to - community theatre companies in London. The next three chapters offer case studies of community theatre, each tackling 'community' from different angles. The first of these chapters focuses on the work of the London Bubble.
Chapter Five

Community Theatre: Anywhere that theatre’s not? The Case of the London Bubble

“Community theatre is about finding the right ingredient that brings people together”.¹

5.1 Introduction

The arguments of chapter four were intended both to highlight and to challenge the peripheral status of community theatre by outlining the various ways that companies - that can be said to practice theatre in the community - have chosen to define and approach their work. In opening such practices to critique, I have argued that assumptions about theatre in the community, and more specifically, views that rest on the repudiation of a ‘community theatre aesthetic’, are bound to be open to contradiction. This is because applications in theatre in the community span a variety of working methods and aesthetic rationales that cut across a range of potential meanings of community. Community is sometimes defined by a constituency of interest - such as the identification with youth or minority communities - and also by place or geography. This renders the ability to construct a firm definition of community theatre problematic.

In building on the tenets of The Combination, however, I have suggested that current concepts of theatre in the community - to varying degrees - invest in a notion of theatre that is more open and responsive to the communities it serves. As we have seen, the means by which such principles are realised range widely. Some companies (for example, Outside Edge discussed in chapter six) use theatre as a vehicle for changing audiences’ perceptions of

themselves and their life choices. Others, (for example, Nitro and Theatro Technis) aim through the recognition of marginalised communities to encourage non-traditional theatregoers into conventional theatre buildings.

My concern in this chapter is with a practical engagement of theatre in the community which, in taking theatre to where people are - not only marks a return to the original, primitive function of theatre, but also - seeks to meet communities on their own terms. It is an approach I have alluded to in discussions of Kettle of Fish, Arc Theatre Ensemble and Proteus, but which I now want to offer sharper exploration of through a case study of the London Bubble (the Bubble). The London Bubble is a particularly illuminating case because it invests heavily in a notion of theatre in the community that places participation at the heart of company practice. In this way, the company seeks to produce democratised performances through the creative involvement of participants and audiences in professional and participatory projects.

The Bubble also highlights a characteristic of much contemporary live performance: it challenges conventional barriers to the experience of theatre. The company seeks to do this through the utilisation of promenade and site specific theatre. Promenade performances see performers playing amongst audiences rather than to audiences, which, whilst providing a more intimate and immediate experience of theatre, also problematizes the traditional divide between actor and spectator. Site specific theatre refers to the staging of a dramatic event in spaces that relate to, or that are 'specific' to, the world of a play. For example, in the Bubble's promenade productions of The Wonderful Adventures of Alice in 1996 and A Midsummer Nights Dream in 1999, audiences were transported through the magical green land of parks.\(^2\) Crucially, site specific performances, by utilising unconventional and public spaces, bypass a potential hurdle to the inclusion of more diverse audiences.

\(^2\) Although many of the Bubble's promenade performances are 'site specific', site specific performance does not always incorporate the promenade form.
As Reynolds (1997:87) explains, such an approach can bring theatre to those “...unfamiliar with theatregoing ... or uneasy with the idea of entering a building whose use is associated with the narrow cultural preoccupations of the educated ...[socially elite]...”. Furthermore, the Bubble’s use of promenade and site specific theatre challenges distinctions between professional and community performer by incorporating both in performance.

By staging its relationship to theatre in these ways, the London Bubble can be seen to pose interesting questions about the nature of community and its relationship to theatre. Critically, ‘community’ for the Bubble, refers to the collective involvement in and shaping of, theatrical performance. In fact, methodologically, the Bubble’s approach sees a ‘sense of community’, of ‘belonging’ and ‘togetherness’, as one aspect of the company’s much wider mission to create an open and accessible form of theatre that is in tune with the needs of both audiences and participants. The Bubble’s notion of collectivism, then, does not entail the nostalgic hankering after a past that never existed, but is instead concerned with the fundamentals of making community.

This chapter offers a sharper focus on ideas of community, by showing how the experience of participation is based on individual and collective effort, achievement and negotiation. I am primarily interested, then, in looking at how ideas of community are made in practice. I will explore this issue in terms of two different areas of the Bubble’s company practice. I discuss the professional producing company in the first section of this chapter and participatory work (and specifically, the adult drama group) in the second. To begin the task of analysing the practical engagement of theatre in community, I focus on the promenade production of Gilgamesh staged in July 2000. Firstly, I will consider the rehearsal process as both a realm of actor/actress and
participant training and as a space of interaction and a means through which community is practically produced. Here, I also discuss questions of 'otherness' and 'difference'; mental/physical access; inclusion/exclusion, place bound identity and localisms. In doing so, I reveal the zones of tension between the Bubble’s 'community' of performers and the Bubble’s community of locality. Secondly, I explore the performance phase, paying particular attention to the promenade form and the idea of a 'moving' (site specific) theatre. I consider the various settings and locations of the performance and seek to decipher how aspects of the every day, urban environment are made 'visible' through artistic transformations (Savietz, 2000).

Thirdly, looking at how the rhetoric of community is challenged, I examine community participation as part of the Bubble Adult Drama (BAD) Group. I place particular emphasis on how participants are given the opportunity to assume more principal roles - both literally in terms of the kind of characters they can play, and in more general ways - and as such, how they achieve greater responsibility. I also argue, however, that the BAD group fails to fully transgress barriers to a complete involvement in theatrical activity because of the fragmented nature of the classes. In this chapter, then, I will demonstrate what my experiences as a participant observer in the rehearsals and performances of Gilgamesh and in the BAD group workshops, have taught me about community and the practical contexts in which it is made. First, however, I offer a brief account of the Bubble’s company history.

5.2 ‘A Bubble of Imagination’: A History of the London Bubble

The Bubble began in 1972 with a tent, at a time of strong 'community' rhetoric - in local government specifically and within the art world more generally - and in the year preceding The Combination’s arrival in Deptford. Similarly, there were connections with the Half Moon Young People’s Theatre, which,
like the Bubble, was established on the initiative of the then Greater London Council (G.L.C). The G.L.C had been responding to the perceived lack of theatre in many London boroughs. The Bubble, in taking theatre to new audiences, sought to answer this need. The significance of the 'tent' is that this was to be the unique means with which the Bubble transported its brand of innovative, popular theatre to London's parks. Trisha Lee, current director of the company's participatory projects, reflects:

"That was the idea of the tent, that people would come and see the tent, and that it was an event. You know, Blackheath, just up the road, was one of the venues that we used to go to. And for a lot of people - I mean I still come into contact with people who say yeah, I remember as a child walking up seeing the tent, going and seeing something in there. So it was quite a visual presence, this huge blue tent".³

As a metaphor that connects the smooth, gliding movements of a bubble, with the physical transportations of a theatrical tent, 'Bubble' becomes an apt name for the company. Furthermore, Glen Walford, the Bubble's first director, is quoted as envisaging a "bubble of imagination", or a "bubble of ideas" to reverberate with who ever saw the tent.⁴ Once inside, spectators could expect to see adaptations of Shakespearean works, which some commentators (see Davies, 1987:185), have remarked carried an "irreverence smacking of the penny gaffs". As crude and as frivolous as this nineteenth century form of entertainment may have been, the penny gaffs - because of their renowned popularity and accessibility (they were cheap and in easy walking distance) - find an echo in the Bubble's mission "...to create a popular theatre form that is open, exciting and accessible".⁵ Like the penny gaffs, the Bubble's early shows seemed to have particular resonance with families, children and mothers with excited babies - generally users of parks.

³ Interview - Trisha Lee.


⁵ London Bubble publicity leaflet, 2002.
Theatre then, was popularised through its transference to an open, public space.

As the company evolved, the annual programme grew to encompass a wide range of participatory projects. These were led by a specialist team and would allow participants to get involved in the theatrical process of play making in more active and tangible ways. This is a coherent and generally recognised theme of community theatre: that participation facilitates a sense of ownership of the theatrical presentation, of theatre belonging to the audience rather than just put on for them. In 1993, the Bubble restated this goal:

"In 1993 members of the company and the Board of Directors undertook a review of the company. The result was a reaffirmation of the company’s objectives of introducing new users and participants to theatre but an agreement that the tent was not the only means of delivering that objective".  

Whilst then, the endeavour to reach new audiences remained a prime motivation of the Bubble, the means employed to achieve this changed. An annual programme of work that sought a fusion of the producing and participatory side of the company became the order of the day. The season of the tent, alas, was no more. The company today resides in a building on Elephant Lane, a residential street in Rotherhithe, (South East) London. It is an area that juxtaposes an environment of hardship with that of prosperity and wealth, an issue, which has implications for the performance event that occurs in surrounding parks and open spaces, as I will discuss later. The Bubble building - a once derelict grain warehouse - provides the company with much needed office space, but, perhaps, more crucially, has become a home away from home for staff and participants. Adjacent to this building is the Bubble’s

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7 The company’s original building in North London, became too small.
rehearsal space, a modest room in size, but which the company - in recognising the fact that they are one of the few companies afforded this provision - feel fortunate to have, as Trisha Lee asserts:

"...[W]hen the Bubble set up, what they were doing was very unusual and something that hadn’t really been seen. It was quite pioneering really, and out of that, you know, this building, not many theatre companies - you know, a lot of small scale theatre companies don’t have an office. We have a rehearsal space over the other side... Even with or without you saying ‘this is brilliant’, there’s lots of things wrong with this building. But actually, on the other side, it’s really, really lovely. We’ve got quite a lot".  

Arts funding, or as is usually the case, a lack of it, is central to determining what companies can or cannot do. It can mean the difference between the size of a company, the number of productions and/or projects that will be staged in a year, and distinctions in working conditions and indeed whether companies have premises to work from. On the last point, one should add that often companies (e.g., Kettle of Fish) that struggle to obtain funding carry out office duties from home. The London Bubble, however, is a fully funded organisation. The company is supported by London Arts (L.A.); London Borough Grants (L.B.G); Southwark Council; and the National Lottery. Even so, and as I shall discuss in relation to the Bubble Adult Drama group (BAD) in section two of this chapter, resources are minimal and the relationship the company has with participants is as a consequence increasingly difficult to maintain.

The Bubble is funded to produce two professional shows a year and to run various participatory theatre projects with young people and adults. Led by

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8 Interview - Trisha Lee.

9 The Bubble is also a member of Equity and The Independent Theatre Council (I.T.C).
the artistic insights of Jonathan Petherbridge (Peth), professional actors/actresses have been directed in performances of a site specific and promenade nature. These summer productions take theatre to parks and woods and also retain the mark of the Bubble's original use of music and improvisation. In addition to this, the incorporation of masks, costume, puppetry, song and dance, further speak in a theatrical language to which contemporary audiences can instinctively respond. Because such shows are outdoors, they call for actors/actresses who are able to be deeply and imaginatively creative with their art. Facial and body gestures must be large and expressive, and voices strong, so as to communicate effectively in varying weather conditions.

Further to this, and because these actors/actresses will often work with participants from different cultural, social and ethnic backgrounds, who vary in age and in artistic ability and who are not professionally trained, they tend not to be egotistic or self absorbed. Instead, largely versed in the ethos of community based performance, actors/actresses are able to engage and interact well with participants, especially the young performers. In fact, seldom will the actors/actresses appear as the experts, endeavouring instead, to integrate with participants and thus share an egalitarian commitment to the process of making theatre. The Bubble also has a policy to reflect the communities it works in, so casts tend to be multicultural.

Sometimes the Bubble will run workshops for the under eleven's alongside the summer productions. These are called 'make show and play' workshops and are a means of introducing younger audiences to theatre:

"...I mean, I like make show and play workshops because actors tell them [children] a story, run the workshop actually, you know, making masks, and making instruments. The actors sit with the kids, and then

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10 Peth remains the company's current director, a position he has filled since 1989.
the kids and the actors do something together at the end. So it’s a really good breaking down that barrier of like actor because the kids see them as people. And its like yeah, they can tell a good story – and then hopefully, they’ll come to the evening show, see actors that they’ve actually worked with, performing in the park...”

The idea of the actor/actress being elevated to an almost omnipotent status, one generally enforced through the separation of actor/actress and audience, is being challenged here. Crucially, in bringing both actors/actresses and participants together, the actors/actresses are divest of their heroic, even magical powers. The illusion is broken and they are thus seen as everyday, ordinary people.

The Bubble pantomime can also be seen as part of the company’s professional activities. Significantly, for the Bubble, the Christmas panto is the only show that is performed in a conventional theatre space. This is because, as the Bubble asserts, the style of pantomime, the dynamics of performer and audience, demand that they are separated from the audience in the conventional way. The Albany Theatre, the history of which has long been rooted in the communities of Deptford (and which has been noted in section 2.2.1), is one of the Bubble’s preferred sites for the Christmas pantomime, another is the Crochrane Theatre. Past pantos have included Cinderella in 2001; Aladdin in 1999; Red Riding Hood and the Wolf in 1998; and Jack and the Beanstalk in 1996. Having been modelled on the Bubble’s trademark of wit and imagination, these, as well as other productions, have had wide appeal. They are, however, to be distinguished from the pantomime seen in, for example, West End theatres:

“...[T]hey’re [Bubble pantomimes are] very traditional, but they’re not like, West End star-led productions, we don’t have any famous people. They’re more - they’re very community and feel good kind of things...Very different. I get very angry with West End star led

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11 Interview - Trisha Lee.
productions, because it’s still - it’s setting up some one as that famous person. It’s not, linking with the audience, and I just find it a bit patronising really. And, trying to, you know, a lot of adult jokes, above children’s heads, rather than actually trying to include children and adults together on an equal level”.

The Bubble’s notion of pantomime then, aims for increased access by providing a form of entertainment that favours neither adults nor children, but which instead seeks to combine both:

“And, because our shows are suitable for both adults and children - and we fight the term ‘children’s theatre’ because we’re not - we don’t do shows that are for children, we do family shows. It’s very much about the whole, being together, which is you know, another sense of community, the whole family being able to attend an event and being welcomed at that”.

The idea of family as ‘community’ is a salient theme amongst community theatre companies (for example, Proteus, which seeks to provide work that carries an ethos of ‘good family entertainment’). As with a sense of community, the concept of family engages with ideas of belonging, of togetherness and strong personal bonds. In making theatre that responds and resonates with the whole family, the Bubble panto can be seen as engaging with two notions of community: community as an event, and as collective family dialogue. Trisha Lee, in commenting on the perceived misuse of pantomime by some of the mainstream establishments explains:

“And I think that what’s interesting is that panto time of year, a lot of theatres jump on the, ‘hey we’re inclusive, bring people in’! I mean it was one of the things we discussed at pantomime last year, was that thing that we do this all year round and actually, its quite annoying when you see these sort of companies being like, ‘come here kids, we want you now’...And then when its over, it’s like, ‘well actually our season doesn’t include you now’. It’s not about bringing - a lot of

12 Interview - Trisha Lee.

13 Interview - Trisha Lee.
mainstream theatres like that don’t seem to realise the power of having something that is a good vehicle for bringing new audiences in. And they don’t even begin to try and take that on into other things because then immediately their programme then falls back into the mainstream thing, and the audiences that they are trying to attract”.14

The implication is that established theatre - which is often viewed as a closed community, largely because of its commercial imperatives and barriers, and its use of esoteric work, or work that can only be appreciated by the culturally elite - is jumping on the ‘community’ bandwagon at panto time, seemingly adopting inclusive goals to support their own divergent objectives.

As part of the London Bubble’s commitment to community theatre, the company also runs a variety of participatory groups:

“There’s... Megabytes, which is fourteen to twenty - four years of age; then there’s Byte Size, which, well it’s eleven to fourteen year olds; and then we have BAD group, which is Bubble Adult Drama. So, there’s three main groups that we work with”.15

The most recent addition to the trio of participatory projects is the Self Start Group. This is where the more experienced members from the Bubble Adult Drama group (BAD) are given opportunities to “…produce, direct and publicise their own piece of theatre with minimal help from Bubble staff”.16

Critically, all projects have been designed with the aim of helping participants explore new ways of creating theatre. The focus is not on the artistic capabilities of participants but rather on promoting an understanding of theatrical crafts and the potential for participants to express their own ideas. Frequently, participants are those who live in close proximity to the Bubble

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14 Interview - Trisha Lee.

15 Interview - Trisha Lee.

premises, or have taken part in previous shows. Unlike the professional productions, however, where participants largely function as supporting artists, participation in project groups allows participants to assume principal roles and as such, greater responsibility.

Participatory projects vary according to the group and the age of the members. However, a common thread throughout is the fact that the theatrical product will nearly always be specially produced. In the youth theatre, projects are sometimes based around ‘communities’ or ‘themes’ of interest:

“...[L]ast year we did some work with young carers who are people who have got a parent who’s got a disability...And, it came out of wanting to work ...with single parents. We wanted to do a project about young single parents and then locate the young carers. I had never heard of young carers, and basically young carers spend a lot of their time... missing school, to look after a parent with disabilities. And it’s where they’ve kind of slipped through the net and the parent isn’t getting the proper care from the state, and so the young people have ended up taking the responsibility. We came across this young carers group, and, ended up sort of working with a lot of young people ...sort of ranging from about eleven to sixteen. And also pulling in single parents from that group on a project called ‘Never Minding’, which was all about, caring and you know, the effects of being a carer”.17

As scripts are devised, the participatory projects often utilise plays that can be adapted to unusual settings. For example, the BAD group - under the direction of the Bubble’s associate director, Adrian Jackson - produced a play that explored the subject of health, A Picture of Health. This was staged in Kingswood House, West Dulwich, which had been a convalescence home during the First World War. As Trisha explained to me in regards to another project, the objective of performances in the BAD group, is to challenge

17 Interview - Trisha Lee.
theatre that occurs in special places, and in this way, the passive consumptions that occur in such spaces:

"...[T]here's a project that we're working up at the moment, we're looking for deserted hospitals. So it's finding interesting venues for various performances, we've used old houses that have got scenes taking place at different times... it's anywhere where theatre isn't rather than where it is".18

Characterised by 'inclusive' and 'popular' initiatives, the Bubble's company history reveals the concern to make theatre accessible, by meeting people on their own terms. As we have seen, this has involved taking theatre to where people are, making theatre affordable, and creating an atmosphere in which people will feel welcome. In the next section, I will demonstrate how such inclusive policies have remained central to the Bubble's engagement with community theatre, by exploring the opportunities for community participation in the company's production of Gilgamesh.

5.3 The London Bubble's Production of Gilgamesh: An Analysis of Community in Practice

'The Bubble'
The Bubble has stood for generations on Elephant Lane, a street where the inhabitants walk tall for England, tall for St George, tall for themselves. Its effect is that of an old factory, well built, generously built; and its metal frame, though debased, is sturdy, durable. Positioned directly opposite the Bubble, a pub, the name of which escapes memory, but which could quite easily have been called 'The Pride of England', or something to that effect. There are benches where people may sit, but not many do. Instead, they stand firm, solid, rooted. Rooted in a union of joblessness, redundancy - inactivity. From the pub, a cobbled path leads to a series of lavish new apartments. These, like their (newly acquired) upwardly mobile occupants, seem to ooze a certain smugness, a kind of complacency, as if they know events surrounding the extension of the Jubilee Line has caused their market cred to soar. The inhabitants of these flats tend to lead an inconspicuous existence; always dashing it seems, from car to home and from home to car.

18 Interview - Trisha Lee.
They are not so mesmerised by ‘the street’ as perhaps they are by their own material possessions. Not so taken with those who ‘walk tall’ and who ‘stand rooted’. In fact, the two camps seldom meet. They are - economically, culturally and spiritually - worlds apart. What is more, there is a sense that both like it this way.

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The production of Gilgamesh was - as the Bubble is - intended to be grounded in this sense of ‘urban drama’, in the everyday, urban environment of Elephant Lane, and amongst the fragile and fragmented communities that characterise the area. The production was staged by the London Bubble in the summer of 2000, at Mayflower Gardens, a park, which backs on to Elephant Lane (South East London). Besides the team of professional performers, technicians, stage managers and costume designers/makers, the production also incorporated over one hundred participants drawn from the local community. Many of them lived in the surrounding estates of Mayflower Gardens, which meant that there was a very real potential for theatre to engage with, as well as for it to be absorbed into urban daily life. The harsh realities of inner London, however - that is, street crime, juvenile delinquency, deprivation etc - not only made it difficult to achieve this, but also meant that the theatrical production of community would depend on some degree of separation from the communities in which Gilgamesh would be staged. In a sense, then, the Bubble’s notion of theatre in the community could be seen as being governed by the company’s awareness of, and to some extent a correspondence with, the outside world. The term ‘reality’ is particularly significant because in the Bubble’s utilisation of promenade and site specific theatre, and specifically in Gilgamesh, the theatre space - i.e., the trees, grass, woodland etc - is real. The ‘world’ of Gilgamesh is represented through the real world.

19 The production of Gilgamesh was also staged at Deptford Park and Oxleas Woods. However, I will be focussing specifically on the performances at Mayflower Gardens because this is where the Bubble is based.
My purpose in this section is to explore how community is produced in rehearsal and performance. I argue against nostalgic notions of community, arguing instead for the role of negotiation and struggle. The London Bubble's production of Gilgamesh is central to this task and to an understanding of how ideas of community, participation and involvement translate in performance. Before discussing the performance event, however, it is necessary to establish how (if indeed) bonds are forged amongst participants, which may or may not be carried through into the performance phase. To this end, the first part of the section discusses the rehearsal process, both as a realm of actor/actress and participant training, and as a space through which participants get to know each other. I begin with a synopsis of the play and discussion of the cast (see box 5.1).

**Box 5.1: 'A Synopsis of Gilgamesh'**

**‘Gilgamesh’**

Based on the Epic of *Gilgamesh*, and written for the The London Bubble by Farhana Sheikh, this 5000 year old story tells of the tyrannical king who rules over the city of Uruk. Gilgamesh first finds love with the Village girl Shamhat, and rivalry and then friendship with Enkidu, a bestial wild man of the forests. Together they embark on a series of adventures that pit them against Humbaba, monster of the forest (see Fig. 5.1) and the goddess Ishtar, represented by three identically dressed women (see Fig. 5.2). In slaying the sacred Bull of Heaven, the Gods decide that the two friends have gone too far. They condemn Enkidu to death, leaving Gilgamesh to wander the earth in search of immortality. This search leads him to the edge of the world and to the old man, Utanapishti (see Fig. 5.3), but to no elixir of life. When, at last, Gilgamesh has a chance of eternal youth, it is snatched away from him by a passing serpent. The moral of the story is clear, as Gilgamesh himself comes to learn:

Gilgamesh: “Gilgamesh the mighty! Gilgamesh the invincible! He thought to conquer death. And do you know? Death will conquer him. Death will have the last laugh!”
**Fig. 5.1** ‘Humbaba’ - Monster of the Forest

**Fig. 5.2** ‘Goddess Ishtar’
It is useful, before launching into the specifics of how community was produced in the rehearsals for *Gilgamesh*, to firstly introduce the reader to the Bubble staff involved in the production, and also to the environment of the Bubble more generally:

**‘Introductions’**

I knew Peth was the director long before meeting him. That was unavoidable for, no sooner had he walked into The Bubble office, a stillness fell upon the room. There was an air about him, a kind of surety, almost expectancy - the look of a leader. The Bubble staff seemed oblivious to the effect their director’s almost ecclesiastical presence had had on them. This, however, looked to be a respect well earned. Peth literally stood heights above most of the other staff. He had dark, piercing eyes, and greying hair, which seemed to add to his regal charm. Officially, Trish - the company’s participatory project’s Director - was the first member in the team for *Gilgamesh* I met. In fact, it was Trish that had invited me to participate in the production, having conducted an interview with her earlier in the year. She
would prove to be an invaluable authority on the Bubble, as indeed she would on the general character of theatre in the community. Trish, too, was tall. She had long, dark brown hair, which gave her an elegance and natural beauty even when wearing - as she often did - an old pair of jeans and scruffy T-shirt. She seemed to particularly confide in two others - Sylvan and Lawrence. Sylvan, like Trish, was on board to generally assist and liaise with participants. He had been pointed out to me on a previous occasion at the Bubble; I heard his voice challenging the others to have ‘a really productive day’; and so when finally meeting him, I found myself warming to him very easily. Sylvan was of Afro Caribbean decent. He was masculine in build, though, really, very gentle. The project’s dance co-ordinator, Lawrence, would provide all the rhythmic instruction we were likely to ask for. My first sight of him was out side of the Bubble office, and, on that occasion, I was less struck by his glaring femininity, than by the tiny pair of jazz shoes he clutched by his side. Tom, who was to provide the musical element of the production, reminded me of a musician in a traditional folk band. This was because his choice of instrument was the accordion on which he often played tuneful ‘folkish’ melodies. Tom was quiet and seemed modest. Sometimes, I found myself leaning forward to catch what he was saying.

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Those first ‘meetings’, ‘sightings’ of the staff assigned to Gilgamesh, and the warmth and relaxed temperament each clearly displayed, created (in me) a sense of the Bubble being an open and welcoming space. Such impressions were further reinforced by the ‘Bubble Handbook’, which was given to participants on the first day of rehearsals and which also contained important information about the Bubble and company practice. Of particular interest, here, is the section of the handbook entitled, ‘The Environment We Wish to Create’, in which a vocabulary of understanding and harmony is used to bolster good conduct amongst participants and to ground vital skills for performance:

“At the London Bubble we hope to provide an environment where everybody feels welcome and relaxed regardless of his or her gender, race, sexuality or ability. Within our workshops and rehearsal process we wish to create a group atmosphere that is enjoyable, friendly and encouraging of respect and trust.

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We aim to involve everyone in the work at the level that they feel comfortable with. To enable this to happen we ask all the participants to be encouraging of each other. To accept the variety of abilities within each group and to listen and respect people for their opinions and the contribution they are able to make. If someone in the group misses a session then we encourage other members of the group to help that person catch up on whatever they have fallen behind with.

Participants will be expected to work with everyone in the group and we discourage work that is centred only on a friendship basis. When asked to form groups or to partner up we encourage individuals to think about approaching people who they would not normally work with or who they don’t know. Through co-operating with others we believe participants will learn one of the most vital skills for performance: the ability to work well in groups and take risks. By joining the London Bubble’s Participatory Groups you will be expected to take part in every activity of the session...

The London Bubble is a professional theatre company and we treat our participatory groups with the same level of respect and expectation as we would our professional actors. We expect participants to be reliable and show commitment to the work in hand. We ask that everyone takes their role in the group seriously and demonstrates this by turning up on time for sessions or telephoning if they are unable to attend”.

The first three paragraphs of this quotation, as well as some of the conceptual categories underlying the whole extract (insider/outsider, inclusion/exclusion), reveal the Bubble’s quest for an environment of tolerance, acceptance and encouragement. This, of course, is part of a well-established tenet of community theatre: that the space (the performance/rehearsal space, workshop/project area, etc) in which and with which participants/communities move and interact, is inclusive and open. The Bubble cites the rehearsal realm in particular, as an arena in which an atmosphere of ‘respect’, ‘trust’ and ‘enjoyment’ can be realised. It could also be argued, then, that it is a space in which ideas of community are imagined and conceived. For my purposes, it is important to understand how, and

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under what conditions participants are seen to commit (if, indeed they do) to such notions of community. We must begin, then, by exploring the rehearsal sphere, the arena in which participants first become acquainted with one another.

5.3.1 Analysing Community in Practice: Rehearsing *Gilgamesh*

| 'Rehearsals'
| Pat and Ieda, those two pensioners who brought a special quality to rehearsals - Pat, with her songs from the war, and Ieda with her dirty jokes - were sitting on one of the settees in The Bubble office, eating biscuits and drinking what Pat, who liked to keep things simple, called 'pop', and Ieda more flamboyantly called 'champagne'. Pat, who had learning disabilities, was in her mid to late seventies and lived just across the road from the Bubble with husband, Ted. Ieda, who was somewhat younger than Pat, was an eccentric. She wore hair extensions in every colour imaginable and black legwarmers, which she liked to wear over equally intensely coloured tights. Of the other participants, some - notably the younger boys - were playing computer games. One of these boys was Luke, a pudgy faced, 'karate-crazed' nine/ten year old, who seemed to obtain great pleasure out of causing trouble and to getting up to mischief. Others - twelve to thirteen year old girls - sat in twos, sometimes fours, reading teen magazines. Jessica, Sophie, Shovan and Nisha, for example, were inseparable. Their friendships cut across artistic ability and ethnic background - Jessica and Sophie were White, Nisha, mixed race and Shovan was Black. In fact, the unifying force between the girls, that is, apart from their age, was the rap star, 'Eminem', whom each carried a 'special torch' for. Several others, like Redly (a Sri Lankan man in mid to late forties); Monica (a retired fifty year old woman); Eric (an unemployed man in mid to late forties and of mixed raced heritage); Phil, (late thirties/early forties); and Arte (an Asian woman in her mid to late twenties), went through scripts chanting lines. Charlie and the rest of the professional actors/actresses on board sat patiently, sometimes talking about the previous day's events, nearly always trying to include the rest of the participants.

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This extract gives a hint of what happened at the beginning of rehearsals, before participants dispersed into their relevant groups. At the enrolment for *Gilgamesh*, participants had been required to fill out a form confirming
whether they wished to be part of the choir or the chorus and also their availability for rehearsals and various performances. This information determined what group participants were put into. There were two groups—group '13' and group '24'. Participants assigned to group '13' were in scenes 1 and 3; and those allocated to group '24' were in scenes 2 and 4. I was part of the band of '24s' and as such, often started the session over in Mayflower Gardens. The main reason for this was to acquaint participants with the environment in which they would be performing, but also because there was limited rehearsal space in the Bubble. Once in the park, participants were taken through a series of warm-up exercises and improvisations:

Exercise 1

1. Take a deep breath in, then slowly breath out (repeat 4-5 times)
2. Take a deep breath in, then breath out and whilst releasing breath make a sound (repeat 4-5 times, experimenting with different sounds).

Exercise 2

1. Take a deep breath in, breath out making sound; place hands on head, cheeks, chin, mouth etc, and monitor effect (repeat 4-5 times).

Exercise 3

1. Form two teams, each contain equal number of people
2. Stand directly opposite other team, so that everyone is facing a partner
3. Try to force other team to other side of room, park etc, with voices.

These exercises were generally designed to get participants to take risks and therefore build trust:

'Taking Risks and Building Trust'

I recall on one occasion, Sylvan requesting that we work with a partner (for exercise two) "no where near our own age". Partnerships were formed slowly and apprehensively; we barely exchanged a few words, but knew that in order to break free of our inhibitions, we had to engage in what was to be an unfamiliar union. The child I stood beside had looked half my age—
a daintily built little 'Black' girl, with hair in braids. I can remember her looking very apprehensive, as if she had wanted me, as the adult, to take charge. I knew, however, that Sylvan's request had been a call for participants to take risks, which to some extent, would involve each of us pushing our own boundaries in different ways. This would also entail a rethinking, perhaps of the natural way in which we might interact with each other, an experiment, even, with group dynamics. I recall that I was taken back when my partner began to initiate the exercise, impulsively reaching to place her hands upon my cheeks. This had been my cue to take a deep breath in.

Breathing out so that my partner could feel my cheeks vibrating, I sensed that she had suddenly felt embarrassed by her impulsiveness. I decided that I would bend down a little, to aid and direct her towards my forehead, so that vibrations from that particular area could be felt. In the middle of this my attention was drawn to a partnership much more impressive than ours: this was an 'Asian' woman in her late fifties, early sixties, who had teamed up with a 'White' man of about fifteen. The first notable aspect of this partnership was that on the face of it, neither appeared to have anything in common. The second was there still appeared to be a lot of communicating going on, conversation and conferring, with no identifiable person taking the lead. And the third interesting feature was that there was an overwhelming sense of 'mutuality' between the two, a subconscious agreement to share attention and a communication of intention. Despite (or maybe because of) their unlikely partnering, the two participants seemed happy and confident enough to be enjoying the exercise for its own sake.

Research Diary 28.06.00

One way of understanding the quality of such exercises and how participants seemed to become personally transformed and empowered through them, is through Erving Goffman's notion of the 'social front', which he defines as:

"...that part of the individual's performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance" (Goffman, 1969:32).

"Front", continues Goffman, "is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance" (p.32). Goffman distinguishes between different aspects of the social front. There is the 'setting', which refers to the furniture, décor and
other scenic properties that define human activity taking place within or upon it. But, there are also expressive qualities of the social front, which Goffman terms 'Appearance' and 'Manner'. The former refers to "...those stimuli which function at the time to tell us of the performer's social statuses" (p. 34). They also direct us towards the kinds of activity the individual might be engaging in, whether that is formal social activity, work, or informal recreation. The latter refers to "...those stimuli which function at the time to warn us of the interaction and role the performer will expect to play in the oncoming situation" (p. 35).

It follows, then, that an astute and affirmative manner may relay the performer's intent to direct and initiate verbal interaction. A timid and meek manner, on the other hand, may give the impression that the performer expects to follow the lead of others, or can at least fulfil this role. Goffman emphasises that both 'appearance' and 'manner', may, at certain times, appear to contradict each other. For example, when a performer "...that appears to be of higher estate than his audience acts in a manner that is unexpectedly equalitarian, or intimate, or apologetic" (p. 35). Of course, in such cases - and as Goffman also acknowledges - we might be talking about performers in terms of being exceptions to the rule. I want to argue, however, that participants involved in the warm up activities acted in 'manners', which in some instances, conflicted with their 'appearances', for other reasons.

Following, then, Goffman's notion of the 'social frame' and the way performers use different frames of reference to define the kinds of people/situations they are interacting with/in, I would claim that participants - in order that the exercises were carried out in a spirit of 'risk' and 'adventure' - became highly skilled in acting out of their social frames. This ultimately involved an initial assessment of the appearances and manners participants appeared to display: in terms of the young girl I had worked with, I had decided, because
of the impression of 'apprehension' and 'timidness' she conveyed, that she had wanted me to take the lead. I had attempted, then, to try and judge what she was like and how she wanted interaction to be initiated. So, in the first instance, my judgements had been dependant on the characteristics she primarily betrayed. However, when she assumed to act out of her 'social frame', and, critically, not in a self-centred way, I was also directed in a manner that called for the 'decentering' of my actions.

Similarly, with the 'Asian' woman and 'White', teenaged boy, and also a middle-aged 'White' man that had worked with a young 'Black' boy of about seven or eight: they could be seen communicating very effectively in ways that were not necessarily consistent with their appearance or manners, but which guaranteed that each participant was on an equal footing. Moreover, such communication was governed by a sense of adventure and by pushing individual boundaries, which in itself was very rewarding. Apparently, participants, as they described it, were empowered by the fact that such interaction had been so enjoyable. So the warm-up exercises seemed to have an affirmative and empowering affect on participants, whilst coaching them in, to quote the Bubble, "one of the most vital skills of performance: the ability to work well in groups and to take risks".\textsuperscript{21} In this sense, such exercises opened up a space of learning, of co-operation, which created in that short time, an opportunity for participants to form bonds and to get to know each other.

There were other moments within the rehearsal process when participants seemed to be unified by a holistic experience and by a sense of working together to get things right. This was seen, for instance, when a particular scene in Gilgamesh, the moment when Gilgamesh himself dives into the sea in search of the elixir of life, called for participants to manoeuvre a large blue,

\textsuperscript{21} The London Bubble Handbook For Participatory Groups, 2000.
polystyrene cloth. Of utmost importance, in terms of the dramatic impact of the scene, was for participants - who stood on either side of the sheet, moving it in a rippling motion - to elevate the cloth and, whilst still holding it, allowing it to fall, revealing an ecstatic Gilgamesh clutching the secret to eternal life. There had been a real effort on the part of every participant involved, to get the timing of this pivotal point of the play precise. After several failed attempts, many participants had begun to let out huge sighs of exasperation and there had been complaints about the most horrendous form of arm ache imaginable. There had also been, however, a very real sense of wanting to succeed. Finally, after what must have felt like the fiftieth attempt, participants managed to create the illusion required for the scene. There had been a feeling of jubilation, of pride and of happiness.

This sense of wanting to work together, can be attributed, I believe, to the ethos of community endorsed by the Bubble, and the spirit of tolerance and respect that underscored the theatre environment. This was also seen to filter into other areas of the rehearsal process. For example, when participants were not required for a scene, they were free to wander over to May Flower Gardens. This is where most of the participants spent superfluous time, lazing in the warmth of a fine summer’s day. It is also here that I fully appreciated the sheer mix of people involved on the project - an assortment of professionals, amateurs, students and parents. Participants also varied in age, in social, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, as well as in artistic ability. There was a willingness, however, to accept such difference and also the individuality of each participant. It follows that on one occasion I asked Luke, what he did the day before: he hadn’t become flustered by the fact that someone that differed from him on almost every count - and who, I should include had not spoken to him before - he just told me about it in a few words. The professional actors/actresses too, were able to engage and interact with the participants. In particular, Charlie and Daniel, the main protagonists,
endeavoured to integrate with members, opting to play games with the juniors, as well as converse with the others.

What was especially exciting against this background was the fact that the participants seemed to be engaging in real and meaningful friendships with people, who, in the main, they probably had very little in common with. It was in this sense, I became very close with Sophie, who was twelve and lived in New Cross:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘Sophie’</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sophie’s dream was to be an actress and she was in love with the thought of this. That is how she had initially approached me, with stories of when she would break into the world of acting. As the days past and more rehearsals went by, Sophie and I began to establish a routine: she would wait for me at the start of rehearsals, where we would then progress over to Mayflower park. In the park, Sophie would exchange horrifying facts about ‘Eminem’ and I’d tell her about my research and what university was like. One day I came in to find that Sophie was not waiting for me. Later, I found that she had found companionship with Nisha, Shovan and Jessica - girls her own age. The next day Sophie approached me, reddened face and notably uncomfortable. She proceeded, throughout the day, to acquaint me with the girls and constantly enquired if ‘I was ok?’ Of course, I had been, but was touched by the fact that Sophie cared.</td>
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There are several factors to be noted in this anecdote, particularly the real sense of friendship myself and Sophie shared; the protection of my feelings; and her attempts to integrate me into the group. I think that this was made possible by the environment created by the Bubble. This, in turn, produced a kind of ‘wider solidarity’ amongst the participants, whose ‘common identity’ as supporting artists further reinforced a willingness to embrace - cultural, social, ethnic etc, - difference. The fact that the participants were united by a common purpose, perhaps, allowed them to forge, true and meaningful friendships with dissimilar members, at least within the period they would be working together.
In an important sense, then, the rehearsal realm provided the basis for broad cultural, social and ethnic exchange, and encouraged respect and understanding between participants. An important issue that seemed to reoccur within rehearsals for Gilgamesh, however, was the fact that participants were involved in the production in different ways and to varying degrees:

**'How involved are you?**
The rehearsal room - to which participants were often summoned after a warm up session - was a small and cluttered space. For those of them that had the gift for acting, it was undoubtedly a welcoming room; those of them that did not, could be quite forgiven for not seeing it in such a positive way. Peth however, avoided gracefully enough ever showing bias towards any one participant. In fact, when, for instance, the time came to allocate lines to the chorus, Peth was more than generous to those who lacked confidence in their artistic abilities, or perhaps, were socially shy. The majority of participants were not newcomers to the Bubble, which meant that he, to varying degrees, had an idea of what each participant was like. Pat, was one such participant and when it came to the allocation of her lines she continued to recite them - for all to hear - until she had been satisfied that she had got them right. As a general rule, all participants were assigned lines and/or at least had a part to play in the production. This ranged from featured roles, such as the two participants who, along side professional actress (and star of the BBC television series, The Thin Blue Line) Mina Anwar, were chosen to play the goddess, Ishtar. Then there were participants collectively known as ‘the people’, who, firstly appear as the people of Uruk and then as the people of the forests. These participants formed the chorus and a considerably smaller proportion of these made up the choir. There were also those participants who, as puppeteers, moved the hands of the Gods; or those that engineered the movement of Humbaba, or, who indeed played the cedar trees bordering his lair; and those who twirled the smoke can that added ferocity and effect.

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Because, as the above extract reveals, the degree of involvement in Gilgamesh ranged from participant to participant, members tended to make value judgements against other participants, as well as themselves. There can be no doubt that the director went to great lengths to ensure each participant
took part in the production. However less attention was paid to the question of how participants would feel about the kinds of role they were playing, and still less, to the question of their ability to project on others what they felt was a 'good' or 'bad' part to play. For example, this was reflected by the younger participants (e.g., when a participant asked the director: “what is the name of my character, is it just 'boy'?”), while some of the older members had been keen to know how the two participants playing Ishtar had been able to acquire the role. In this respect, it is significant that at least one of the participants playing Ishtar, attended The Brit School of Acting. Peth could therefore expect a certain level of artistic experience and professionalism. All of this relates, of course, to the issue of artistic quality and the ability to reconcile this with the goals of participation.

The immediate environment of the Bubble also posed something of a problem to participants. While the actual premises acted as a kind of cocoon to those involved in Gilgamesh, outside of the Bubble was uncomfortably hostile:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>'The Pride of England'</th>
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<tr>
<td>Most of the time, because the Bubble office remained open throughout the day, participants were free to come and go as they wished. When participants were in the Bubble, they were safe, but outside was a completely different world. Here, the inhabitants watched you intently, mockingly, slyly. I knew I didn’t belong. For to belong, you are firstly white and secondly male. As I was neither, I didn’t really stand a chance. One Sunday, Phil - a white man - and myself walked from the Bubble office to a McDonald’s store in Deptford. On this small stretch we met six men in England T-shirts, four of which were counted before ever leaving Elephant Lane. I very naively asked Phil whether there was a game on, oblivious to the fact that it was not football season. Phil, sensing my uneasiness, simply answered, “No, some people just like to wear those tops, silly ain’t it?”</td>
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It follows from this, that although the rehearsal realm was an arena in which an atmosphere of respect and trust was realised, its immediate environment was hostile and unforgiving. Apart from the 'macho' displays of nationalism -
which seemed, to me, more about the men asserting their place-bound identity - I write about in the above extract, youths (a gang of six to eight boys and girls, aged between ten and fourteen) in the surrounding estates of Mayflower Gardens, gave equal cause for concern in relation to the other participants. For example, on several occasions, the youths attempted to disrupt - i.e., deliberately run across scenes, tease participants (e.g., Luke) they knew for being involved in the production - rehearsals that were being conducted in the gardens. It is this almost paradoxical quality - i.e., order within disorder - that the production of Gilgamesh was intended to be fuelled by and, as we shall see in the next section, the Bubble found innovative and effective ways of dealing with the youths when it came to actual performances.

In concluding this section, I return to some of the 'paradoxes' of community. It follows that the significance of the rehearsal process, as a period in which participants were able to forge bonds and connect with each other, did not rest on an ideal or ideologically ingrained notion of community. While such bonding did seem to engender a sense of harmony and 'community' feeling amongst participants, these feelings were also born out of acts of perseverance, of tolerance, co-operation and success. In the next section, I attempt to gain a better understanding of the practical contexts in which community is produced, by exploring the moving, 'site-specific' performance of Gilgamesh.

5.3.2 Analysing Community in Practice: Performing Gilgamesh

'The Opening Performance'
Sylvan had stood near the entrance of the Bubble, in combat trousers and a loose shirt; with Humbaba's tongue in his hand, and trepidation written all over his face. It was true that for a long time, no one had spoken about the actual performance. Rehearsals had seemed to flow by and with them, the prevailing reason participants were there. Preparation for Gilgamesh had become long, tiring, and arduous. The day of the opening performance had arrived and there was a general feeling of exhaustion. Inside the Bubble, the
participants’ morale had been low. Arte, in particular, was not happy. She’d explained: “All the fun is taken out of an event like this because it is so gruelling”. This had been a far cry from the enthusiasm Arte had displayed when she first arrived. The actors/actresses, on the other hand, had been determined to raise spirits by telling jokes and providing words of encouragement, generally trying to create a more jovial atmosphere.

Outside of the Bubble, stewards - the gang of unruly youths who had been ‘ingeniously’ invited by Peth to take on the ‘very important’ role - showed audience members to the performance location. Some of the audience members had arrived prepared for promenade. Some had come visibly ready to embrace the outdoors with waterproofs, whilst others wore old jeans, caps and trainers. Many of the members, it seemed, were also keen to indulge in the customs of established theatre, congregating in and around a bar, which was located in a tent away from the performance area in Mayflower Gardens. In the bar was a selection of soft and alcoholic beverages and also food, which the audience could partake in before the performance event. Tom supplied the Middle - Eastern tinged musical overture, over which excited members laughed, talked and waited in anticipation for the theatrical event to begin. Meanwhile, the participants, by this time, had nervously gathered at the production’s first site, bound by a spirit of determination and unified, both, by the belief and the desire that *Gilgamesh* would exceed their parents’, their loved ones’ and the critics’ aesthetic expectations. The performance began, as Tom invited the audience to join him in journeying on the epic quest of *Gilgamesh*.

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The audience - notably mothers pushing prams, carers wheeling the disabled, the young, the old and also people from different ethnic minorities - was ushered, by the three narrators, from one side of the Thames, over grassy glade and housing estate and back to the river. To enhance journeys between the different scenes of *Gilgamesh*, the different worlds of myth and reality, the audience was further required to unlock their imaginations and re-envision the space. For example, the first site, a stony area of Mayflower Gardens that was set against the backdrop of the Thames and distant monuments of London, was to serve as a prospect of the city of Uruk. This called for a recasting of the way audiences perceived Mayflower Gardens, especially if they frequented that environment in the every day.
In a similar vein, Deborah Savietz in, ‘What Counts Is The Landscape’ (2000), catalogues the artistic director Pino Dibduo’s quest to render ‘visible’ aspects of the every day, urban environment that we no longer have the imagination or the patience to ‘see’. Seeking to explore the ways in which the arts can enhance the social and economic viability of cities, Dibduo asserts:

“A city can be a dream, a business, or a solution to a problem, but its centre is the human being struggling with his identity, community and relationship to society” (Dibduo, cited in Savietz, 2000: 54).

For Dibduo, therefore, place and the ability to transform place so as to reveal an environment often taken for granted, becomes the spine of his site specific theatre.

Certainly, the setting and location of Gilgamesh played a huge part in constructing the character of the performance as well as reinforcing dramatic effect. For the director, then, the surrounding environment had undoubtedly offered aesthetic possibilities. For the participants, who, during the rehearsal phase and at other times frequently visited Mayflower Gardens, the performance landscape seemed to transcend memories of what was there before. There was a sense of discovering the environment anew, of recognising aspects otherwise taken for granted, and of appreciating, in a ‘Back to Eden’ like sense, the hidden beauty of nature i.e., the trees, sea, grass etc.

In moving through this new landscape, then, the meaning of Gilgamesh was conveyed. In terms of audience participation, moving from one place to another also added a feeling of involvement and of being a part of the play. This was aided by gifts of fruits along the way, which were handed out by the ‘fruit bearers’ - notably, the young girls who had been part of the local gang. The fact that the actors/actresses often treated the audience, at times, as if they
were part of the participant population, also reinforced the feeling of being involved in the play. This was seen when the narrators directly said to the audience, “Off we all go”, as a cue to follow them to the next scene. This was further compounded by the audience’s close proximity to the performers. Participation in promenade, however, requires a degree of responsibility from audiences - in terms of their reception of the play and indeed their fellow spectators’ experience. It is this idea of responsibility that is thought to bring about a sense of community that Trisha Lee gives eloquent voice to:

“And what is really interesting there [with promenade theatre] is I think you do get a real sense of community, of people sort of hurrying along to get to next spot, children running in the front and sitting down. The idea of letting people with rugs through, and talking - cause in the theatre one of the things you can’t do is talk, you’re not supposed... I mean there’s moments between each scene when they are walking, where people are talking, where somebody has got a torch, ‘cause its beginning to get dark and they’re showing it to someone that they’ve never spoken to, so actually it does invent, it does create a sense of a community that you wouldn’t normally get”.

In practice, then, it is the challenges presented by promenade, for example, nightfall, adverse weather conditions etc, that generate a ‘blitz’ spirit and feelings of unity.

In terms of the involvement of participants in the performance, emphasis was undoubtedly placed on promoting an appreciation of the theatrical process of play making. There was less of a focus on the individual skills and talents of participants (except when necessary to a particular scene). Through participation in Gilgamesh, participants were able to move beyond the position of spectator to engage with theatre in more concrete ways. The inclusion of both professional and community performers in the production was in many

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22 Interview - Trisha Lee.
ways advantageous. It allowed participants - individuals who may not have been given the opportunity otherwise - to see the actors/actresses as ordinary people and not as omniscient beings invested with magical powers. Furthermore, participants were given the chance to take part in a professional production. There are also, however, disadvantages to the inclusion of both professional and community performer. For example, near the end of the performances, and as morale began to drop, relationships between the performers seemed also to break down. Most noticeably, there was polarisation between the professional actors/actresses and the participants. And this, it seemed, was borne out of resentment from the community participants, who had began to feel inadequate about the fact the actors/actresses had assumed the more substantial roles. I think that this was further compounded by the fact that some participants had overheard audience members talking about 'quality' performances, and in all instances, such comments were when the audience had been talking about the professional artists. The participants thus seemed to become a 'community' within themselves, from which the professionals - who had become known as 'the paid lot' - were excluded.

To conclude this section, I have tried, through an exploration of the 'site specific' production of Gilgamesh, to gain a better understanding of the practical contexts in which 'community' is produced. Such an exploration revealed that the production was - like the Bubble is - grounded in the urban realities of Elephant Lane. It follows that by using 'reality' - i.e., grass, woodland, trees - as the medium to present 'theatre', the Bubble has challenged notions of performance occurring in a special place (i.e., 'theatre' buildings). More crucially, however, the company has confronted the reality - of crime, delinquency, deprivation etc, - of the communities and landscapes in which the production was based. This can be seen, for example, in the Bubble's decision to incorporate known 'troublemakers' as 'stewards' and
'fruit bearers' in the production. Staging Gilgamesh in the everyday environment of an inner London borough further allowed for theatre to engage with, and to be absorbed into, daily urban life. In this way, as an audience member I witnessed many residents coming out of their houses to see what was going on. On one occasion, a woman asked, 'what are they filming?', and when I told her Gilgamesh was not film but theatre, she remarked: 'theatre? Ooh, never been to one of them before', and promptly joined the promenade. Needless to say, if theatre was not 'brought to the community', the resident - like many others - may never have encountered a theatre experience.

I have shown how participants were able to engage in the process of theatrical production in ways that a) contributed to their understanding of the process of playmaking; and b) supported - largely through assuming roles that supported the professional cast - the successful campaign of the show. As we have seen, this gave rise to feelings of inadequacy, of impressions that participants were not on equal footing with the professional members (even though a great deal of effort was made on the part of actors/actresses to integrate with participants). This raises a series of important questions concerning the extent to which community involvement in a professional producing company like the Bubble, can meet the ideals of 'community' embodied in community theatre. It also suggests that there are limitations as to what companies might achieve within their professional programmes. In the following section, therefore, I examine community participation in the Bubble Adult Drama (BAD) group, with a view to exploring what participative opportunities are opened up for participants.
5.4 Community Participation in the Bubble Adult Drama (BAD) Group

In this short section, I want to examine community participation as part of the BAD group, with particular emphasis on how participants are given the opportunity to assume more principal roles - both literally in terms of the kind of characters they can play, and in more general ways - and as such, greater responsibility. To discover the full potential of BAD in such a project, it is necessary to firstly identify some of the egalitarian features the group possesses:

'Egalitarian Features of BAD'

1. *Everyone is Welcome.* Anyone that is eighteen or over is invited to join BAD. No one is excluded; neither on the grounds of race, gender, disability or sexuality. Further to this, no prior theatre skills are required.

2. *It is affordable.* As part of the Bubble’s commitment to making theatre more accessible, participants can learn theatre skills or devise, rehearse and perform a play for around £30 a term. There are further concessions for students and the unemployed.

3. *There are no Experts.* With the exception of the professional practitioner that facilitates the project, all participants enter on an equal footing. The facilitator themselves, will not appear as the expert but will instead endeavour to encourage a collaborative approach to work.

4. *Performances utilise site specific theatre.* This means that performances tend to utilise unusual spaces, with the object being to avoid the often controlling environment of theatre buildings. In terms of audiences, there is a greater sense of ‘liveness’, of imaginative opportunities offered and accessibility.\(^\text{23}\)

The ‘principals of equality’ that underline the BAD group emerge from the largely democratic theories that lie at the foundation of theatre in the community. I want now, by looking at the process leading up to the BAD

\(^{23}\) This information has been gathered from pamphlets on ‘BAD’, which have been supplied by the Bubble.
group’s production of Pandora, to examine how this spirit of egalitarianism was practically implemented. I shall argue that participants invariably attained a deeper level of involvement from the BAD group. However, I will also show how the relaxed tone that permeated classes, their flexible nature and thus the irregularity in which participants attended - while being an inherent strength of the workshops - meant that relations with participants became increasingly difficult to maintain.

**Pandora (2000 - 2001)**

Pandora - a site specific production which explored the lives of (modern day and classical) vampires and which examined ideas of immortality - was staged in November 2001, in the mesmerising depths of a derelict church, and after a succession of postponements and rescheduling. Participants had started BAD in November 2000 with the expectation that they would be performing in Pandora in March of the following year. For these participants, particularly those that had been involved with the professional producing side of the Bubble on previous occasions - for example, in Tales from the Arabian Nights, Gilgamesh and Sleeping Beauty - BAD held out the promise of tangible and direct focus on the development of personal and theatrical skills. Such skills, in the production of Pandora, could (potentially) be more thoroughly explored and more clearly expressed. Notably, however, only a few familiar faces from Gilgamesh were in BAD.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>From Gilgamesh to the BAD group</th>
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<tr>
<td>In the two months following the production of <em>Gilgamesh</em>, the Bubble staff had been besieged with phone calls from newcomers and members alike, wanting to know more about the kinds of projects the company had to offer. Involvement in <em>Gilgamesh</em>, it seemed, had infused both participants and audiences with big appetites for performing. So big, in fact, that the number of enquiries about BAD (as well as the participatory groups in general) had, according to the Bubble, reached ‘record proportions’. Accommodating every participant that expressed an interest in BAD, therefore, would prove</td>
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unworkable. In late October, letters were sent to participants informing them of two further options (besides BAD) that they might pursue. Remaining the primary option, the BAD group would now be suitable for new members, or participants with experience of only one BAD show; The second option, the BAD choir, would be open to adults and young people over fifteen; and the third, an exciting new option called the Self Start Group, would cater for existing BAD members with experience of two or more Bubble shows.\(^4\) At the same time, the BAD group (which I had opted to be a part of), an unlikely alliance of diverse but creative individuals, found solace in the cluttered spaces of the rehearsal room - the place in which *Pandora* would be imagined and devised.\(^5\)

On the first day of BAD and in an atmosphere charged with anxiety and excitement, participants exchanged names, occupations and individual pastimes around a small, but perfectly formed circle. Introductions revealed two familiar faces - Connie and Sue, who had both been in the choir for *Gilgamesh*. Connie was in her late twenties to early thirties and spoke with a strong Italian accent. She had glamorously thick, dark brown hair and was chic in appearance. Sue, a graphic designer in her mid to late thirties exuded FUN; she wore brightly coloured lipstick and flamboyant shoes. Newcomers included Ben, Alonso, Sue-Ellen and Nikki. Ben like Sue, was a graphic designer and in his mid twenties. He had striking black hair and side burns trimmed to a careful point. The only 'Black' guy in the group, Alonso, was also in his mid twenties. He was quiet but confident in theatrical ability. Sue-Ellen was a middle-aged woman with decisive features: she had curly, dark brown hair and wore round, silver rimmed glasses. Nikki was a young woman of twenty-three year, who had a slight mischievous puffiness to her cheeks that made her look considerably younger. She was also a student at Goldsmiths University. For these participants, the drive towards creating *Pandora* in the proceeding weeks and months - in terms of the level of attendance, enthusiasm displayed and creative input offered - would, by and large, remain constant. On the other hand, for many of the participants that followed, interest in *Pandora*, along with attendance, would peak and trough, dip and dive and, in some instances, eventually come to a complete halt.

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\(^{24}\) It was this last option that the likes of Redley, Arte, Rob, Eric and a number of other memorable participants that had been in *Gilgamesh*, signed up for in November 2000.

\(^{25}\) Participants that had been interested in joining the BAD choir, had not been required to enrol until January 2001.
As the principal aim in this section is to examine how the governing egalitarian ethos of the BAD group provides participants with opportunities to assume more principal roles, it is necessary to focus on the ways in which participants were encouraged to develop their own and theatre related skills. In this way, I begin by describing three improvisational exercises, (see box 5.2 below) which centred on participants 'listening to each other'; 'having the strength to go with an idea'; and 'giving audiences what they want to see'. The specific context for the following improvisations is the Bubble rehearsal room. At the beginning of every session, participants were taken through a series of warm up exercises (see p.177), the primary goal of which was to create a sense of unity and trust amongst them. These were generally followed by the improvisational activities.

**Box 5.2: ‘Improvisational Exercises’**

**Improvisation 1: Act out a scene in which three people are set upon and are then eaten by a monster.** Myself, Ben and Alonso were chosen to enact this scene, leaving approximately four other participants as well as Trish to act as our audience. As we emerged in the space that was soon to become our acting area, a great sense of dread and fear vehemently raged inside of me. There was a moments pause as we each waited for someone else to take the lead; seconds later, and in character, Ben beckons us to “come on”, and proceeds to lead towards a vision of his own making. The scene immediately gains pace and we are avid explorers who have journeyed to the unknown. Alonso inventively reveals that we are in a remote jungle, which is ‘invaded by ants, poisonous hairy caterpillars and mythical beasts’. I add that the monster that we have come to slay, will have by now picked up on our scent and could come out of his lair at any moment. We were working together. Trish challenges us to “believe in what we are doing”. Yet the irony of believing that we were in a jungle and would be soon set upon by a ferocious monster, served to make the task more difficult. This, coupled with the fact that we would have to die on stage - a notoriously awkward illusion to realistically create in theatre - produced, in me at least, an overwhelming sense of fragility, which in turn translated into a very real need to plough through the scene and bring it to a speedy end. The actuality of ‘performing death’, as imagined, was awkward, and even more so for Alonso, who, being the last participant to take his final breaths on stage, had to (and did) avoid simply repeating what myself and Ben had done. As our lifeless bodies laid stretched out across the floor, it was our intention that
this is where the scene would end. Then Trish instructs, “take the story further”, “what do you think the audience want to see”? I remember deeply resenting the audience’s thirsts for more because it had suited each of us to bring the piece to a close - we hadn’t wanted to ‘take the scene further’, we were, after all, dead. In character, Alonso slowly stands to his feet and in an attempt to breathe new life into the piece, says ‘What is this place’? This was directed at Ben and I, and was, in fact, a signal that we were both also alive. As the scene progressed, it seemed clear to me that we were in heaven: Alonso remarks, ‘It’s dark in here’, to which I added, “Yes, very peaceful”. Alonso continues, ‘Where do you think he is?, to which I, still clearly pursuing the idea of heaven, reply, ‘I don’t know, but I can’t wait to meet him’. At this point, Trish jovially bellows, “You’re blocking him Yvonne”, and decides, after conferring with the audience that we should end the scene there.

Still on stage but out of character, Trish explained that in ‘blocking’ Alonso, what had effectively been happening was that I had been working against him. I had believed the explorers were in heaven and as such, steered the scene - in terms of the language I used and euphoric tone with which I spoke - in that particular direction. To the audience, Ben and Alonso, however, it was clear that the travellers’ exploits had taken them to hell.

Improvisation 2: One participant stands in acting space. The remaining participants are to tell a clear, plausible story by giving instructions to the participant to act out. For example, the instructions for the story Sue-Ellen enacted were as follows:

Instruction: “You are pacing up and down the room”. Sue-Ellen proceeds to frantically pace up and down the acting space.

Instruction: “Suddenly the telephone rings”. Sue-Ellen (wrongly) stops pacing and goes to answer the phone. It is in the hands of the participants to correct Sue-Ellen, as they did, asserting that no instruction had been to answer the phone. Sue-Ellen thus, continues pacing.

Instruction: “You stop pacing and hurriedly go and answer the phone”. Sue-Ellen rushes to the phone and says ‘hello’ in a stressed out tone. I can particularly remember this part of the exercise because Sue-Ellen’s anxious tone prompted me to assert:
Instruction: “Your baby starts crying”. Sue-Ellen sweeps her head in an upward motion to signal that the baby is upstairs. Sue-Ellen has a worried expression on her face.

Instruction: “You don’t know what to do. The other person on the phone is upset and you can’t leave them”. Sue-Ellen starts to shake her head from side to side furiously. She occasionally looks in the direction of where her imaginary baby is and is still clutching the phone.

Instruction: “You drop the phone and fall down onto your knees”. Sue-Ellen, almost in slow motion, releases the phone. She walks, very slowly, then stops. Still looking in an upward direction, she begins, again to frantically shake her head. She falls to her knees, her hands clasping the crown of her head.

End of story.

*Improvisation 3: Act out a scene in which one person is throwing a birthday party. Guests should arrive one at a time and mingle until further instruction is given.*

The first time this exercise was performed, I was advised that I would be the participant throwing the party. In this way, I was to take the actual experience of giving a party or a similar event, and act accordingly. It so follows that I pottered around my make believe dining room, sorting crisps, peanuts, finger foods, into their relevant bowls and generally busying myself until my guests arrived. Accordingly, there is dancing, flirtation and some heavy intake of alcoholic beverages. Then Trish asserts that some participants are to suddenly get uncontrollable urges to blink as they are speaking; some participants are to speak very, very slowly; and some, to articulate themselves with a lot of authority (in all cases, participants are told which roles they should assume). As the person throwing the party, however, I was to remain acting as I had throughout the scene. This briefing of eccentric characters - characters, which were both witty and sinister - effectively made for high drama.

The object of the exercise was to see if participants suited ‘high status’ or low status roles. In the following weeks, the exercise was repeated with different participants assuming different roles. It emerged that I was best suited to playing high status characters and looked uncomfortable playing low status characters. Both Ben and Alonso were able to play low status roles very well, whilst Sue, Sue-Ellen, Nikki and Connie were comfortable playing both ways.
The improvisational exercises served to promote an understanding of the play making process, whilst also providing participants with a firm grasp of (some of) the theatrical skills needed for performance. The 'monster' and 'story telling' enactments both, critically, centred on 'listening' and 'responding' to instructions and other actors/actresses within - and outside of - the performing space. In fact, not attending to what was being said meant that vital information was lost and the stories ineffectively told. In the monster improvisation, 'listening' to the other participants on stage effectively aided in the construction of the scene, which had - until the imaginative and intuitive collaboration of the participant actors/actresses was brought to bear - been broadly defined by the facilitator. The participants input, then, not only brought specificity to the piece, but also helped to create the 'theatrical illusion'. The illusion - that is, the acceptance by the audience that the actors on stage were avid explorers in a remote jungle, etc - was reinforced by the facilitator's call for participants to 'believe in what they were doing', which was simultaneously a call for them to get into character, to immerse themselves in their individual roles. This notion, is of course, the centrepiece of Stanislavski's 'system' of acting: the intellectual, physical and emotional preparation of actors/actresses in order to produce a living portrait of character:

"Sincerity of emotions, feelings that seem true in given circumstances, that is what we ask of an actor" (Stanislavski, 1980:50).

Here, however, participants were smoothly inducted into Stanislavski's teachings in ways that contributed to the natural advancement of their practical experience, as opposed to the facilitator taking a didactic or formal line of approach. For the participant actors/actresses in the monster enactment, 'believing' in the 'given circumstances' and that they were inhabitants of the universe created on stage, proved very challenging. This
was because of the absurdity and fantastical nature of the improvisation, and because of the demands it made on the actors/actresses (e.g., having to skilfully and believably die on stage). The participants' belief in what they were doing, however, was vital to the audience's involvement in the illusion and to their acquiescence of the characters and stage action as real people and real events. Watching this improvisation as a member of the audience, I appreciated the importance of the three participants on stage believing in what they were doing. If they held back, the audience too, was compelled to. Their own belief - as well as the talent and skill they displayed - made them 'watchable' and the scene believable.

As a participant actor/actress, however, and perhaps because of our own inability to suspend their disbelief, there were moments when the audience also struggled to engage. Definition of the scene became ambiguous as focus was placed on bringing the piece to an end that primarily suited us, but which effectively ignored the audience's concerns. This was further compounded by the fact that we had stopped listening to each other, the result of which meant that communication and dialogue shut down, was 'blocked', as individual visions were pursued. Participants learnt, then, to listen and respond to one another; to believe in the role they are playing and in the given circumstances; be courageous enough to let the pieces die their own natural deaths; and communicate with the audience and give them a chance to be a part of what is going on.

The story telling enactment, whilst encouraging all of the above, sought to reveal a more complex understanding of the act of attending and listening to instructions. Crucially, participants found that simple and uncomplicated instructions made for convincing and effective theatre. Furthermore, because the actors/actresses on stage were bound by instructions and could not themselves speak, the importance of image and overriding picture of scenes
was illuminated. In this context, then, the more skilful performances, such as
the one illustrated in the example, were the ones in which the participant
actors/actresses added concrete detail to the instructions, thereby bringing
absorbing action and detail to the enactment. Participants on stage and off
became alive to the 'subtext' - or underlying meaning - of stories.

For instance, the subtext of the mother and baby story emerged as the mother
having post-natal depression which had not been diagnosed. Expressions
that revealed 'angst', and 'anxiety', 'frustration', and deep sighs were skilfully
used by the actress to clarify the subtext. This in turn underlined the dramatic
situation for the storytellers/audience and made them think about what was
really going on in the character's life. These insights - the appreciation of
image based work, what it takes to make a good story etc - would be utilised
in the performance of Pandora. Another role of the impromptu exercises, then,
was in mediating - that is, forming a connecting link between - the rehearsal
and performance of Pandora. This was illustrated in the status exercise, the
primary goal of which - besides allowing participants to pinpoint and evaluate
the particular kinds of roles they are able to play - was to give the facilitator an
idea of who would be playing what.

While collectively contributing to the development of the participants' skills in
acting, forming a connecting link between the rehearsals and performance of
Pandora, and allowing the facilitator to see which participants would play
particular roles, the exercises also encouraged co-operation amongst
participants. Although this was initially instigated by the facilitator, it became
clear to members that not co-operating - that is, not listening to each other or
working together effectively - resulted in the artistic impact of enactments
being lost. On one level, then, teamwork was driven by the desire for
aesthetic quality. Yet, in another, important respect - and particularly as
participants varied in artistic ability - there was a willingness on the part of
members to embrace whatever groups they were in and collectively work towards the development of scenes.

This, I think - like the tolerant environment endorsed through distribution of the Bubble Handbook in Gilgamesh - can be attributed to the principals of equality that underline the BAD group (see again points 1-4, 'Egalitarian Features of the BAD group). All participants would have been supplied with literature on 'BAD' and would thus have had an understanding of the kinds of people that would be involved in the group, as well as the ethos that governed it. It follows that most participants would have come with an openness to working with different people and with the knowledge that there would be an element of give and take. The exercises, therefore, became the principle means through which they were able to do this. We shall see, however, that as the dynamics of the BAD group changed - with arrival of new participants - so too does this initial and fleeting sense of collectivism and community.

In the reminder of this section, I turn to snippets from the research diary to elaborate on the problems (and challenges) encountered by BAD in trying to create an open and flexible environment, whilst also maintaining a level of commitment from participants. I shall argue that although participants were able to attain deep and tangible involvement from BAD, the flexibility of classes, as well as a lack of resources, effectively became barriers to complete and full participation. It follows that a number of participants (including myself) did not take part in the actual staging of Pandora, but instead participated in a 'show of work' in June 2001. The show of work was a kind of performative progress report - shown to members of an audience - that pieced together fragments of different narratives derived from the BAD group's exploration of themes in Pandora. My intention, here, then, is to take thematic cuts across the events leading up to (and including) the show of
work. In such a way, I continue exploration of community participation as a part of the BAD group.

‘Developing Pandora’

For many others besides me the Christmas break had created distance: names were forgotten and new acquaintances were once again restrained. Prior to the holiday, Trish had informed participants that they could start to bring in objects and materials, etc, which were related in some way or another, to vampires and the ‘dark side’. Such items had been placed on a large table at the back of the rehearsal room and consisted of reams of ‘blood red’ fabric, as well as other coloured materials; a large crucifix and (what looked like an) offertory cup. It was hoped that these items would act as a springboard for ideas that could be used in the devising of *Pandora*.

Activity: “Vampires and the dark side”

First steps towards devising *Pandora* found participants in two groups (one group of three and one group of four), brainstorming themes of the living dead, of the blood sucking reanimated corpses known as vampires. This would provide the content for a short sketch - centred around the common conceptions of vampires - that they would then go on to devise. The group I was in, an assortment of familiar faces (Connie and Sue-Ellen) and one unfamiliar one (a tall, blonde woman in her mid twenties), had plunged straight into the exercise. To start with, one person would be needed to write down the group’s ideas on a piece of paper (that would be handed in to Trish at the end of the activity). I remember that it was at this point that the tall, blonde woman, clutching pen and paper asked: “Does anybody mind writing”? This was followed by an uncomfortable silence, during which time I reluctantly offered to take on the task. I say reluctantly, not because I didn’t want to write, but because it had bothered me - as it had appeared to bother the other participants - how quickly the woman had assumed her role as the leader. The fact that it was the woman’s first session at BAD, further surprised me.

The process of brainstorming yielded obvious responses - such as vampires hating garlic; their appetites and thirsts for blood; their aversion to sunlight and their own reflections, etc - with every participant seeming able to make at least one suggestion. Devising the sketch, however, was not to prove an equitable process. In fact, it seemed to be more a case of ‘clash of the titans’, with Sue-Ellen and the blonde woman, quite clearly in a battle to have their say. More crucially, however, was that neither of them seemed to be really listening to what any one else had to say. This made it virtually impossible
for participants to coalesce or to indeed merge the different ideas into a coherent role. The result of this was that when it came to performing the piece, no one really knew what they were doing. This in turn made for what I believed was - but no one in terms of the facilitator or audience commented on - an unconvincing improvisation.

Research Diary 10.01.01

A number of issues are raised in this extract, which need to be addressed. The first point to note is that while aiding in the construction of Pandora, the 'vampire' activity was also designed to be an exercise in cooperation/negotiation. The first obstacle that we, as participants had to overcome was electing the 'group writer'. It follows that what should have been a process of negotiation, of discussion and debate, turned out to be a one-sided interjection which saw one participant asserting herself as the 'leader'. The fact that the dominating participant was a newcomer to the group created further contention because she immediately disrupted the relaxed and uncompetitive tone that had - up to this point - pervaded classes. In fact, up until this point, there was a sense in which the majority of participants at BAD strove to be good 'team players', and therefore actions which thrust members into the limelight, or established individuals in control, were - in the main - avoided. By asserting herself as the leader - that is, directly asking if any participant (excluding herself) minded writing - the 'tall blonde woman' broke the code of the BAD group, and in so doing, alienated herself and the other group members. This had two effects: First, Sue-Ellen, who was not willing to follow the 'blonde woman's' lead, became her prime opponent. And second, Connie (a less confident group member) and myself had to take a back seat in the exercise, which - as well as leaving us very frustrated - to all accounts - that is, my own, Connie, Sue-Ellen and the blonde woman's - made for an ineffective improvisation.

I was able to talk later to Sue-Ellen and Connie about the 'vampire improvisation'. Sue-Ellen, who admitted that she was not used to 'being so
aggressive', also confided: 'I would be damned if she (the 'tall blonde woman') was going to completely run the show!' Whilst Connie explained: 'Everything was going so fast and English is not my first language. I don't know, I hope I don't get in her group again...I hope she don't want to come back!' While, then, an objective of the improvisation was to encourage participants to work together effectively, it was apparent that unless all participants were willing to co-operate, discussions within the group become, at best, fragmented and at worst, hostile.

‘Community and Fragmentation’

For some time now coming to the BAD group has carried an unpredictable charge about it. This is because from week to week, you never know how many participants will choose to turn up. Sometimes you might come in to find five or six participants present, whilst on other occasions there may be fifteen or twenty members. The effect that this has seemed to have is that even participants that have been in the group from the beginning, like Alonso, Ben, Connie etc, appear distant and somewhat withdrawn. Moreover, alliances between members are extremely rare. That is, with the exception of participants who come along to sessions with their friends. In these cases they seem to stick with their friends, until Trish prizes them apart with an exercise that dictates that they will have to be in different groups. But the group has changed in more specific ways too. The first notable difference is that Emma - a young woman in her mid twenties and whom I also understand has worked on projects with Kettle of Fish - has come to the group. Emma is in training with The Bubble and has become particularly instructive in the first part of the session in which she takes members through warm up activities and improvisations. Apart from satisfying her own training requirements, this has also provided Trish with time to work on a Theatre in Education (T.I.E) project she has also been involved with. The second marked changed within the group has been the arrival of the British soul singer, Kelly L’Rock, who has been coming to sessions with a male friend. This has had a pronounced effect on members, many of who, up until this point, have been quite assertive, if dominating characters. These participants are very much in awe of the star and seem more obsessed with the singer’s presence than with the BAD session itself. Even Trish seems (unusually) taken with the singer: During one memorable session, she instructed participants (including Kelly) to improvise a scene in which a ‘famous pop star’ turns up in a limousine to be greeted by a crowd of adoring fans. The irony of this request need not be pointed out, suffice to
say that served to reinforce the singers popularity whilst also reifying the image of a pop star as a well sought after commodity.

As we work through different themes related to Pandora, I have also noticed that participants wait for Kelly to take the lead. In exercises, therefore, it has been a case of 'you tell us what to do and we will follow'. Kelly seems very comfortable in this role and the participants keen for her to play it.

Research Diary 28.02.01

What I want to comment on in this extract is the flexible nature of the classes, the fact that participants attended sessions with friends, and the changing dynamics of the group. To begin, then, the random nature in which participants attended BAD, is, I believe, related to the flexible character of the classes. The two, and only prerequisites of BAD, was that participants had to be at least eighteen, and members paid to attend the group. It follows that no terms had been set in regards to the level of commitment expected from participants, and this further contributed to the fragmented and detached feel of classes. The irregularity in which classes were attended also impacted the kinds of bonds participants forged and the level of friendships made. These tended to be superficial and temporary, in that they lasted for the time participants were in sessions: there was a sense in which if you saw members - with the exception of a few - outside classes, that there would be no need for acknowledgements. This was in stark contrast to the friendships formed during Gilgamesh. Furthermore, that participants came along to classes with their own friends created, I feel, a kind of 'anti-community', which saw members 'sticking' to people they already knew, to the exclusion of other members in the BAD group. While Trish, as facilitator, did make efforts - through various exercises and improvisations - to get different members working together, this too, seemed to last only as long as the duration of the exercise/improvisation.

The fact that Trish was not always at classes also contributed to the unpredictability of BAD. And although participants were warned of the
sessions/weeks Trish would be away from the group, the 'hand-over' between Trish and Emma was not always smooth. Thus, the content of some sessions, instead of being geared towards the development of Pandora, followed a somewhat more unstructured programme of warm-up and improvisational activities. Emma's arrival in the group can, in a very important sense, be seen as changing the group dynamics. This is because, being the same age as, or very close in age to the majority of participants, Emma's position in the group was as an 'advisor', rather than 'teacher', which is closer to the role Trish fulfilled. It follows that participants were more relaxed around Emma and seemed to see her as an equal. For example, on one occasion I observed Ben teaching Emma elements of 't'ai chi'. Moreover - and from my conversations with Sue-Ellen, Ben and Nikki - Emma is training for a position (workshop facilitator/co-ordinator) the participants see themselves as capable of doing.

The arrival of Kelly L'Rock, the British soul singer can be seen as having an additional effect on the BAD group. Although Kelly had initially presented herself as being on equal footing to the rest of the group, members were keen for the singer to reveal her expertise and thus follow Kelly's lead. The singer seemed comfortable in this role and gradually established herself, in various exercises and enactments, as leader.

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<th>'Commitment'</th>
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<td>Before the Easter break, Trish had informed participants that she was keen to maintain a level of commitment from all members of BAD. This had meant that she would be closing the group to all new comers from the beginning of the summer term. She also told us that the performance would no longer take place in May, but was now scheduled for October. Participants were then introduced to the idea of a 'show of work', which would comprise all of the things that we had been working on up to date and which would be shown on May. The rescheduling of the performance has posed problems for a number of participants, myself included. Sue, who had been pregnant when starting the group back in November, was due to have her baby in July 2001. She therefore felt it would be difficult to commit to the</td>
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performance when she would have the commitments of a three-month old baby. As Sue explained her situation to me, she couldn’t hide her disappointment. Similarly, Connie was unsure about her availability for the performance because of working obligations. And even for me involvement in the actual performance of Pandora would not be an option because my time in the field had expired.

Research Diary 28.03.01

Crucially, the BAD sessions were now to be built around the ‘show of work’, which was comprised of three different scenes from Pandora (see appendix II). This would be shown to an invited audience. All participants were incorporated into the first scene, either playing a named character, as part of the ensemble or/and as narrators. It follows that Anesty (a woman in her mid to late twenties) and I would narrate for the first scene and were part of the ensemble. Nikki was to play ‘Pandora’, Zahra, (a girl of about twenty, who came relatively late into the group) was to play ‘The American’, Ben would play the ‘French man’ and ‘David’, and the ‘Cocaine dealer’ was to be played by a drama student called Alex. For scenes two and three, participants were split into two groups. Group one consisted of (amongst others) Ben, Nikki, Sue, Zahra and Alex and they worked on scene two. Group two consisted of Connie, Sue-Ellen, Emma, Julia (who had also worked on various projects with Kettle of Fish) and others, and they were assigned to scene three. It follows that Trish’s request for a level of commitment, whilst instructive, came rather late in the day. And ironically, it was those participants who - until that point - had proven regular attenders that would perhaps not be able to commit to the ‘October’ performance. In regards to the casting for the ‘show of work’, I suspect that participants’ attendance, as well as their ability to give long term commitment to the role motivated Trish’s casting choices.

‘Struggling To Make It Work’

Trish’s request for a level of commitment appeared to have fallen upon deaf ears as new faces were still constantly appearing. Notably, though, a lot of the participants cease to come to sessions anymore. Group two have been wrestling with the ‘Isis scene’ for some weeks now. Part of the struggle has
been due to the low attendance of our group, which has meant that, each week we constantly have to bring people up to date with what they might have missed. Also, on one occasion, the group came in to find that all of the material that we used to create the puppets, had been thrown away in a big Bubble clear out. It would be fair to say, however, that part of this tension was alleviated by the rescheduling of the show of work to June instead of May...

The show of work is only a week away and operation of the puppets is still proving a difficult task for some participants. Trish still believes there will be time on the actual day to work on scenes. She has promised participants that everything will be ok.

Research Diary 12.06.01

I want to make two points about this extract. First, the random way in which BAD classes were attended had a direct effect on the productiveness of a session. The morale of participants was also affected, as members explained they did not know who to expect from one week to the next, and thus 'could not be bothered' to put the time and energy in to a scene that could be changed as a result of absenteeism. My second point relates to the 'Bubble clear out': the fact that material belonging to the BAD group was effectively thrown away by other Bubble staff, suggests that relations between the ‘producing’ and ‘participatory’ side of the company are also fragmented.

The venue is a community hall in Bermondsey. The atmosphere is chaotic as none of the participants seem to know what parts they are playing or even what scene they are in. The situation is far from ideal: participants find themselves taking on roles that are normally played by other members - members who are not there. As time draws on it becomes obvious to all that only scenes one and two are complete enough to show, which come as both a relief and a disappointment. There was a sense of relief because no participant wanted to try and perform something that was, on all accounts, not fit for audience consumption. But there was disappointment as this meant that a large proportion of participants would only be involved in a small part of the show of work.

As I sat in the audience - a tiny gathering of family and friends, and notably some members of the Bubble staff, my sadness was reinforced by the
realisation of how impressive the show of work was. The participants on stage looked to be having a brilliant time, really enjoying what they were doing. I found myself wanting to be more of a part of what they were doing, and then felt sad as the reality had been that this was the last opportunity for me to do so.
Research Diary 19.06.01

It follows that what was gained through the BAD group, was an increased understanding of the craft of acting, an opportunity to gain more hands-on experience, and a chance to play more principal roles. What was lost was an increased sensitivity to, and respect and tolerance of, other participants and the sense in which real, meaningful friendships had been forged.

Conclusion
My project in this chapter - looking at how notions of community are made in practice - has entailed chronicling experiences of participation, in both the professional producing side of the Bubble and its participatory work. In the first part of the chapter, I examined the ways in which discourses of community were produced in the rehearsal and performance of Gilgamesh. By discussing the rehearsal realm as a site in which actors/actresses and participants were trained, and a space where participants interacted with, and got to know each other, I have tried to illustrate the different ways that 'community' can be evoked in practice. Community can be an empowering and transformational experience, as seen in the warm up exercises, where participants attained a powerful sense of affirmation by acting 'out of frame'. Community can also be about negotiation and struggle, as witnessed when participants, driven by a nostalgic sense of working together, were able to create the illusion demanded in a particular scene of Gilgamesh. And community can be a willingness to embrace cultural, social and ethnic difference.
In an attempt to expand understandings of community in practice, I examined the performance of *Gilgamesh*, as a 'promenade' and 'site specific' production. I argued here that while the promenade form reinforced audience involvement by breaking with the dictates of 'proscenium staging' which separates performers and spectators, participation in promenade also requires a degree of responsibility. Such notions of 'accountability' are seen to engender a 'spirit of community', a nostalgic sense of collectivity equated to the 'blitz' feeling experienced in war. Audiences of *Gilgamesh* have also been required to use their imaginations, so as to perceive site specific environments in their transformed, dramatic sense. In terms of the participants involved in *Gilgamesh*, I have shown how participation in the production increased appreciation and understanding of the play making process. I have further demonstrated how participants were provided with opportunities to contribute to the creative development of *Gilgamesh*. I have suggested, however, that there are limitations to involvement and participation in highly structured performances: participants are involved in tokenistic ways and are seen to take on the roles of supporting artists. To that end, I offered a brief analysis of community participation as part of the Bubble Adult Drama group (BAD). Here, emphasis was placed on the participative opportunities opened up for participants, who were able to assume more principle roles - in terms of the characters they played and in the level of responsibility attributed - in the creation and performance of *Pandora*. I described how sessions geared around the improvisational exercises, developed participants' skills in acting, and how the 'show of work' allowed members to take on more substantial roles.

Although more concrete ideas of participation were realised in BAD, I have argued that full and complete involvement was hampered by the unstructured nature of classes. I have also argued that such fragmentation was not conducive to the creation of the 'tolerant' community generated through
participation in Gilgamesh, or a sense of 'holistic' community that participants of Gilgamesh experienced through perseverance. Moreover, while the majority of participants in the BAD group were around the same age - mid-twenties - this did not reinforce homogeneous notions of community, or, for that matter, the sense of commonality and cohesion Gilgamesh - which boasted pluralisms of age, class, gender - seemed to secure so effortlessly. In an important sense, however, the BAD group and the professional side of the company produced 'empowering' notions of community, where involvement in the production of Gilgamesh and in the 'show of work' enabled participants to construct themselves as positive and confident people. To explore the sense of empowerment engendered through participation in theatre further, the next chapter examines the ways in which theatre in the community can be seen as a 'vehicle for change'.
Chapter Six

Community Theatre: A Vehicle for Change? The Case of Outside Edge Theatre Company

6.1 Introduction

The London Bubble's concept of participation offered an approach to community theatre that stressed the centrality - the active involvement - of participants and audiences in participatory and professional performances. From this perspective, the idea of 'community' has not been of primary interest; what has been important, however, is the actual experience of participation. For the Bubble, participation has - in terms of participant members - been articulated through the experience of negotiation and struggle and has - in terms of audiences - also relied upon the mental and physical interaction of 'responsible' theatregoers. In this context, individual and collective effort combined with the forging of a 'strong sense of community', not only led to effective participation, but also enabled individual and collective empowerment. Given this, it would seem that participation and community become more complex and sophisticated together. That is to say, community can be understood as a means - sometimes temporary, in that it lasts only as long as participants/audiences need it to reinforce identification (see Lyotard, 1984) - through which spectators and participants become fully engaged in the participatory process.

Participation is, then, an intrinsic and determining element of the London Bubble's practice of community theatre; yet it also embodies an idea of involvement that the company I shall consider in this chapter sees as central to an engagement with the theatrical form. The case I shall focus on - Outside Edge - engages a form of participative, community-based theatre that is
specifically concerned with people affected by addiction. This 'group specific' theatre can be seen as a singular and separatist approach to community, because it centres on a social affliction that is shared by a particular group of people. The experience that Outside Edge affords us, therefore, is quite different from that afforded by the London Bubble, which makes theatre for a wide range of audiences. Outside Edge offers a particularly interesting context in which to examine notions of community because its audiences have a cohesion that distinguishes them from random spectators. Community, here, then, not only refers to a specific group of people, but is also defined by a constituency of interest, a common social concern. Furthermore, the kind of participatory performance that Outside Edge employs - 'Forum Theatre' - is relevant to the issue of community because it centres on the enhancement of both personal and group development.

Deriving from the Brazilian theatre director, Augusto Boal's 'Theatre of the Oppressed', Forum Theatre - or 'Improvisational Participatory Theatre', as it is also termed - is a theatre with a clear political aim: mobilise the oppressed through the revolutionary weapon of theatre. For Boal, theatre is a way of exploring options, which must then be tested in life. The typical form of forum is a theatrical game which, presided over by a figure called the 'Joker' (who explains the rules of the game to audiences and ensures that events run smoothly), sees players in a conventional play and a protagonist trying to achieve a goal and failing. The play is then repeated and the audience is invited to suggest alternative routes for the protagonist to take by enacting solutions. In its purest form, both actors/actresses and audiences will be people who are victims of the 'oppression' under consideration. Boal's formulation of the 'spect-actor' - which combines 'spectator' and 'actor' - reflects the fact that audiences in 'forum' do not just 'sit and watch', but instead participate in potentially 'empowering' theatre that is capable of changing
their lives and thinking. Forum, then, is a ‘force for change’; yet it is not a theatre that goes unchallenged. In fact, one of the most common criticisms made of forum is that its preoccupation with ‘reality’ devalues the art and aesthetics of the theatre. According to Boal, however, forum is only effective when the twin energies of art and (collective) didacticism function in performance.

Outside Edge’s use of forum theatre connects the company to a by now extensive tradition of community and developmental theatre practice. As Adrian Jackson (1992:xxi) notes, forum is ‘...used in schools, factories, day centres, community centres, with tenants’ groups, homeless people, disabled people, people in ethnic minorities... - anywhere where there is a community which shares an oppression’. Forum performance, in the context of Outside Edge, becomes a vehicle for changing audiences’ perceptions of themselves and their life choices. Such performance is often the result of an extensive workshop programme that is centred on (community) participants. Critically, this programme calls attention to concepts of inclusion and access by allowing participants to take part in the key stages of theatrical production (the final stage being the performance). It was a model that Outside Edge utilised in the creation of the participatory drama Harry and Susie Get Married? - a play that follows the relationships of drug addicts/alcoholics and their non-addict/alcoholic partners during active addiction and in the recovery process. The experience of Outside Edge forms the basis of this chapter.

The process of participation as it occurred in Harry and Susie was executed throughout the course of a five-week initiative spearheaded by L.A. At the heart of the initiative, was the idea that participants could be considered as active agents in the production of an aesthetic form. Phil Fox, writer and director of Outside Edge, was commissioned to work with a group of
ex/recovering addicts/alcoholics; four professional actors/actresses; and a documentor, over four one-day workshops and a one-day feedback session. The programme would also include rehearsal and performance attendance, though save for the actors/actresses and documentor, this was discretionary. Recruiting participants was relatively straightforward. A letter, detailing the aim of the initiative was sent to ex/recovering addicts/alcoholics, the majority of whom were people the writer had come into contact with during his own battle with drug dependency, and who also, to varying degrees, expressed an interest in theatre. In terms of the four actors/actresses - two of whom had previous attachments with the company, i.e., acting in past shows - they were recruited through castings for Harry and Susie.

The initiative is particularly helpful in allowing us to analyse what the process of participation means in the practical work of group specific theatre companies. At its core rests the assumption that Harry and Susie could be created out of the experiences of participants and that they would be the principal means through which the play could be constructed and understood. Expressed in these terms, the participatory process would seem to fulfil a very important function: that of privileging the voice of the participant. In principle it achieves this by allowing participants to have access to the many aspects of play production, from development to performance. Exactly what form such access takes, however, depends very much upon the content - that is, the substance - of workshop programmes:

1 All ex/recovering addicts/alcoholics had to have a ‘clean time’ (functioning without the use of drugs or alcohol) of at least six months to be eligible for inclusion in the initiative.

2 Assigned by L.A., the documentor’s role was to provide a map of the writer’s process in participatory theatre. The purpose of this ‘map’ would be to a) detail the various stages of the participatory process, from the workshop phase to performance; and b) allow other writer’s to gain skill and assurance in the techniques of participatory writing. This provision was made possible through a New Writing Fund Award by L.A. Due to unforeseen circumstances, I eventually took over this role -two days into the workshop - from the enlisted documentor.
such programmes, like participatory performance itself, could be criticised as being predominantly therapeutic.

This chapter, in continuing the concern with 'community', offers a critique of the participatory process. The purpose of this critique is to analyse the different notions of participation that emerge when participants - their experiences and life stories, as well as through their active participation in forum - become central figures in the production of theatrical performance. My critique of the participatory process - in which I examine the key components of the system, from the workshop phase to the feed-back session, to the culminating forum performance at the end - is structured in three major parts. In Part one, I examine the first stage of the participatory process - the 'workshop phase'. Here, I explore the ways in which the three main areas of the workshop - the process of play, textual and symbolic mapping and improvisation - allowed for the forging of effective bonds between participants. As the site in which Harry and Susie would be constructed, the workshop can also be understood as a space of interaction and performance. I shall argue, however, that - while functioning to enhance personal and group development - the ingenuity of the workshop was impaired by the largely therapeutic style in which it was administered.

In Part two, I examine how the 'feed-back session' - the second phase of the participatory process - provided the basis for participants to become further involved in the creation of Harry and Susie. In discussing the ways in which participants bring important insights to the session, I also question the limitations of their participation in the workshop. Part three - the 'performance phase' - is characterised by an examination of the sense of empowering community that is engendered through active participation in the forum performance. Drawing particularly on Boal's contention that forum theatre is 'a rehearsal for change', a site in which participants can train for reality, I
argue further that Harry and Susie can be seen as a 'vehicle' for change. As such, I detail the ways in which Harry and Susie becomes a vehicle for participants to question, challenge and rethink their life choices.

**Part One - The Workshop Phase**

6.2 Community and Group Formation

This section explores the workshop - the first stage of the initiative and the initial stage of the participatory process - in an attempt to further understandings of the dynamics of community and participation. The central purpose of the workshop was to produce, through the collective experiences of participants, the content of Harry and Susie. Ex/recovering addicts/alcoholics had entered this phase, knowing that they would be involved in the creation of a play the project writer was currently working on. Similarly, the four actors/actresses involved in the initiative had come through the process of auditioning to arrive at this key stage. As participants, their different voices would merge to produce one narrative. The workshop then, is a pivotal stage in the participatory process. Because of this quite fundamental fact and because participants, in this phase, become the primary means through which a play is constructed, it is useful in enabling us to probe into questions of participation and group formation.

Yet the workshop was also a place in which the many tensions of participants were played out. It was a sphere in which emotions ran high, a space of healing and of therapy. In this context, some have argued that the artistic and aesthetic aspects of the workshop - that is, aspects which were 'creative' and involved or incorporated 'art' - were masked by its largely therapeutic function. A key question here, then, revolves around the kinds of strategies incorporated by the writer/co-ordinator administering the workshop: what
were the methods used/exercises chosen, and in what ways can these be said to be therapeutic and/or artistic? In an attempt to answer such questions, this section will explore the three main areas of the workshop phase - namely, the process of play/activity, textual and symbolic mapping and improvisation. By delving into such processes the efficacy of the workshop can be ascertained.

The Munster studio was the first point of focus for the participants and project writer/co-ordinator, Phil Fox. Initially a site for the workshop, it would later become a performance space - a place in which the ideas of the writer and participants would eventually be played out. Work for participants began at 10.30am until 4.30pm each day, Monday through to Thursday. Each day began with a check in and ended with a check out, which was an opportunity for each participant to share what was going on inside themselves and inside the group. Mornings were generally devoted to warm-up activities/exercises and afternoons, writing and symbolic mapping.

Day 1

‘Beginnings’
(Time: 10.30am)
It is half past ten. I am in the distinct uniform whiteness of The Munster studio anxiously awaiting the arrival of participants. Participants with a history of drug dependency; participants whose lives - I later learn - had been severely damaged before they’d begun. I wait. My eyes follow the artistic director and facilitator of the workshop, Phil Fox. He is walking around among stacked chairs, debating as to whether they should be left this way. He pulls at a chair and says:

“I said 10:30, but you’ve got to allow for people getting lost on the first day, you know?” He releases the chair onto the piled mass. I smile at seeing him so nervous. He is not the only one. I too am in strange and unsettling territory. I am here for my own selfish needs. I have nothing to give. At least nothing they will want.
The Participants

The door is opening. It is the tiny bleached blonde guy [Benny\(^3\): a participant, recovering addict] I smiled with as I pulled up to The Munster. He has a lively look in his eyes that is calming and reassuring. He is shortly followed by three others; two of them [Darren and Gary: participant-actors, also recovering addicts] seem to know each other, the remaining participant [Leon: a participant, recovering addict] somehow withdrawn from those around him. I wonder what depth of experience lies behind each of their chosen expressions. Their faces give away nothing. There are still, according to Phil, about eight more participants to arrive: “More women”, he reassures me. Up to this point, all arrivals have been men. An echo of the scarcity of women in rehab.

It is now five to eleven. I am anxious. Just want to begin. But begin what exactly? Two women [Donna and Michelle: participant-actresses; Donna’s brother is an addict] hurriedly walk through the door, extend their apologies to Phil, and rush excitedly to greet the two men who seem to know each other. Suddenly I wish I wasn’t here - well not in my present guise. Phil is telling me that there is one more participant he expects for certain. When he arrives we shall begin. I feel uncomfortable with Phil’s seemingly comforting gesture. He is trying to include me, reassure me, fill me in with the current picture. But for all his good intentions, I’m still wishing he had relayed this information to someone else. Someone less...conspicuous. My thoughts are interrupted by the advent of the final participant [Rehan: participant, recovering addict]. Entering the room a little awkwardly, he scans each face cautiously as though not quite knowing what to expect. Does anyone know? Anyone that is, apart from Phil?

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The above extract captures the mood of apprehension that initially characterised the first day of the initiative: I am ‘anxiously’ awaiting the arrival of participants; the facilitator ‘nervously’ stacks chairs; participants enter the room ‘cautiously’, etc. In many ways, this apprehension is not out of the ordinary. Embarking on the unknown often gives cause for such feelings and would probably explain the facilitator’s apparent agitation. This does not however, satisfactorily explain my own or the other participants’ anxiety. And

\(^3\) All participants’ names have been changed for the sake of anonymity.
even here, a distinction must be drawn. To take my own feelings first - feelings I describe as 'strange' and 'unsettling' - these can largely be ascribed to the fact that I was perceived as a participant. As such, I would be expected to rethink the contours of chemical dependency, and in so doing, aid in the construction of Harry and Susie. This would involve a conscious and systematic attempt by myself to engage in a world I knew very little about. I would learn that the language of addiction, was one of porn, of prostitution, of illegality. I found myself in a less than expert position to talk about any of these things. Effectively - and as I write in the extract - I had 'nothing to give'.

As more and more participants arrive, my inadequacy becomes increasingly evident. I begin to 'wish I wasn't there', and refer to myself as 'conspicuous' - somehow standing out. Certainly, Phil's assurances - first, to tell me that I would not be the only woman involved, and then later, to inform me that there was one more participant left to arrive - can be interpreted adequately enough as an understanding on his part, that there were potential grounds for me to feel uncomfortable, to feel as though I did not belong. Nevertheless, and on Phil's invitation, I had been included. Similarly, in considering the awkward advent of many participants and their subsequent display of nervousness, this can be attributed to the fact that they had no real concept of what the workshop was about, or indeed, what would be expected of them. In short, the facilitator's decision to not reveal the intricacies of the workshop to participants before hand, had necessitated a sketchy imagining of what the process would entail.

As my argument in this section will rely upon the kinds of strategies incorporated and decisions made by facilitators of workshops, it is useful to think about the way two generally logistical decisions have come to adversely effect participants. In the first instance, my inclusion - not as researcher but as participant - resulted in me feeling largely superfluous. A sentiment later
echoed by two actresses, who themselves were not addicts/alcoholics. In the second instance, Phil’s choosing to not reveal the complexities of the workshop to participants meant that effectively, they were left in the dark and made to feel anxious. What concerns us here, and should continue to concern us, is not whether there are legitimate reasons for these decisions, but how such actions tend to complicate understandings of the workshop and the manner in which it is perceived.

The goal of the first day is, in fact, to acquaint participants with the nature of the project and with each other. In pursuing this aim, the day is devoted to what I shall call ‘breaking the ice’ activities, which we were propelled into after initial introductions. In the ensuing passage, I reflect upon the effect the facilitator’s explanatory words have on participants, before considering the process by which we came to know each other - notably play:

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‘What’s it all about?’

(Time: 11.05am)
Phil summons us, the now eight strong band of participants, into a circle. He begins, while we watch him intently like prize pupils, by explaining that we are all part of a theatrical experiment, the end of which will culminate in a play. The main aim of the experiment is to tell the story of addiction: “You as participants must decide what you want the story to say”, he says. We are told that throughout the course of the four-day workshop we will be exploring themes of addiction, the nature of which may conjure up strong feelings. And we are advised that there will be an opportunity to talk to the resident counsellor attached to the company, if we need to. But we are instructed that this process, this experiment IS NOT THERAPY. Phil has stopped talking. He is trying, as I had attempted moments earlier, to read the faces of participants to interpret silence. It is so unutterably still, Phil’s words rendering the entire room speechless. Perhaps it is knowing that to walk through the sordid world of addiction, is to expose a certain melancholy, the cause of which they know only too well. Sensing the now awkward stillness that has engulfed the room, Phil decides it is time for us to lose any inhibitions—we should get to know each other.
Getting To Know You

By now we are in a large circle. It is time for introductions. What do I say? I daren't disclose my true capacity in the workshop through fear of alienating myself and/or the participants. First off the mark is Darren, Gary's brother. Going first would be a habit Darren never broke. Standing tall in a leather jacket he would later tell me was Armani, Darren was confident in an insecure way. I could tell he was enjoying the fact that all eyes were on him, and when he revealed he was a professional stand up comedian, I was hardly surprised. Second to introduce himself is Benny, the tiny bleached blonde guy. As he speaks, I discern, obscurely, a child's face. He has a childlike innocence about him. He is telling us a little about his fight with dependency and what he hopes to gain from the workshop. Soon, all eight participants - including myself - have spoken. There is Gary, who is administrator to Outside Edge; Leon, a philosophical character who counsels ex/recovering addicts/alcoholics; Michelle, a dancer who has always been interested in acting; Donna, an actress attached to the company; Rehan, an aspiring actor with a 'clean time' of two years; and myself, who I describe as someone with an interest in theatre, keen to learn from the whole workshop experience. I look to Phil, was this a fair description? Phil is thanking us for our introductions, some of which were brief, all of which could play a part in the story of addiction.
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‘The Process of Play: Breaking The Ice’

(Time: 11.15am)

Exercise 1

I am standing in front of my partner, Rehan. All participants have been coupled in an uneasy alliance, courtesy of Phil. I say uneasy, because as far as possible Phil has insured that no participant has been partnered with another of the same sex. So here I stand in front of my partner, Rehan, a very attractive young man. We are told that in a moment we will be asked to close our eyes. Whilst our eyes are closed we must familiarise ourselves with our partners hands, taking note of the texture of their skin and shape of their fingers, etc. Phil continues: “Be sure to adequately acquaint yourselves with your partners hands, because in a moment I will ask you to separate and move as far away from them as possible. I will then ask you to close your eyes once more and find - through trial and error, that is by moving around the room and touching the hands of whoever you come in contact -
your partner"! I look at Rehan, he has an expression on his face I remember seeing some twelve years prior on a boy I expressed strong feelings for. It was awkward and embarrassed. I feel just as uneasy. I resolve however, to block out such feelings. After all, continuing in this vein serves only to prolong the moment. We nervously begin the exercise...

Exercise 2

We have been put into twos again. Same strategy of pairing - different partners. In keeping with the current mood of exploration and authorised intrusion of personal spaces, Phil instructs: “This time I want you to rub your partner’s nose, but I don’t want you to use your hands, I want you to use your N.O.S.E.S...” he trails off cheekily. Without thinking and without uttering a single word, Leon and I plunge into the exercise. It is over in seconds.

Exercise 3

Phil is handing out paper and pens to each participant. His mind appears to be working overtime as he is talking to himself whilst he does so, eager I am sure, to get things right. By now we are sat huddled in a less than perfect circle. When Phil has issued the last participant with paper and pen, he explains that he would like each of us alternately to enter the circle, write our names on the piece of paper, and explain what that name means to us. “I will go first”, he says. I am surprised but pleased at his decision to join in with the activity.

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To extract some of the meaning from the above primarily yields insight into the central purpose of the workshop; it also reveals how the ‘therapeutic’ seed is effectively sown. The co-ordinator’s role in this, as indeed throughout the workshop, is essentially an active one. Utilising the charismatic charm of leaders, he skilfully guides us through the various obstacles of the day. The first hurdle that we, as participants face, is the realisation that we would be exploring themes of addiction. The fact that the nature of this process was such that potentially demanded a counsellor further intensified that realisation. Suddenly, the workshop, instead of being the basis for the artistic development of a play, now became a potential locus for the fears, failures and regrets of participants. In the extract, I write of Phil’s words ‘rendering
the entire room speechless'. And perhaps it is through seeing the silencing
effect of his declaration that further prompts him to instruct: "this experiment
is not therapy". This almost betrays an admission on his part, that the
workshop could be interpreted as such.

In listening to the facilitator's explanatory words, I was provoked by two
things. The first, is his reference to everyone as 'participants': "You as
participants must decide what you want the play to say". I should clarify that
my concern is not explicitly with the term 'participant' - this is effectively what
we were. Rather, the call to understand each individual as a participant, is
simultaneously a call to those who share the same name; the same collective
reputation; the same sources of profound conflict; the same losses and griefs,
etc. In short, our collective framing as participants necessitates a host of other
working assumptions, which in many cases could not be assumed. Such
inferences rest heavily on the notion that every participant is an ex/recovering
addict/alcoholic, and thus able to contribute effectively to the production of
Harry and Susie. Not only does it suggest the presumed equivalence of every
participant, but in doing so, sets the workshop up as a space in which intimate
and private feelings can be explored safely.

The second point I noted in the facilitator's elucidation of what the workshop
was about, is the way he briddles at his own use of the word 'therapy'. To put
Phil's aversion in context, we need to understand the relatively low status
participative, community-based theatre occupies. As an art form, the latter is
generally distinguished from 'high art', 'mainstream' - 'established theatre'. It
rarely receives the much needed attention from national media and as a
consequence, tends to escape the gaze of academics. Many critics of this
participative theatre claim that it is obscure and lacking in high professional
standards. Indeed - and as I have mentioned elsewhere - at its best, it is

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4 Which is why, throughout this chapter, I myself refer to the group as such.
viewed as therapy and at its worst, amateur. At its crudest level, then, the identification of participatory theatre with therapy somewhat neglects its primarily artistic function, and tends instead, to embrace its comparatively modest remedial effects.

We should not then, be surprised by Phil’s instruction that the workshop ‘is not therapy’. What seems a point of bemusement is the subsequent promise of a counsellor, to talk through with participants any difficult feelings that emerge as a result of the process. At first sight, these two aspects of the workshop seem contradictory. If the latter is not therapeutic, why is a counsellor necessary? Despite the easy assumptions that can be made about the aesthetic or therapeutic function of the workshop, however, what is clear is that both require balanced emphasis. If the workshop is treated only as a creative avenue leading to the production of Harry and Susie, then we lose sight of it also being a space in which the intimacies of participants’ are played out. But alternatively, if the workshop is treated only as a place of healing, then the artistic imperative is lost.

A significant feature of the first day of the workshop, is the process by which participants became acquainted with one another. This can be divided into both verbal introductions and the ‘break the ice’ activities that follow. Oral introductions heralded diligent responses from participants. What may have gone unnoticed in the extract, is the fact that almost every participant expresses an interest in the arts. In fact, many pointed to the use of the arts in the rehabilitation of addicts/alcoholics. For example, Darren speaks of using ‘stand up’ comedy to reach other addicts/alcoholics. Similarly, Gary, who has successfully completed a City and Guilds in Acting, contended that a more profound grasp of the latter would be of great benefit to those in recovery. Rehan, currently in the midst of an acting course, realised he had a particular talent for the craft after years of effectively playing the role of ‘the dealer’ on
the streets. An interest in the arts and in theatre, then, can be seen as a key factor in the facilitator’s selection of participants. It is worth remembering also, that it is these people that would collectively transform their own stories and experiences into theatre.

It is easy to see how the participants’ predisposition to performing is exploited in the subsequent ‘break the ice’ exercises. Having said this, however, they demanded a boldness and confidence even the trained actor/actress might find difficult to deliver initially, at least. If we consider exercises one and two, there is commonly an atmosphere of spontaneity in which we are encouraged to explore, discover, create. There is much concern, on the part of the facilitator with the loss of inhibitions - our inhibitions. Accordingly, we are propelled into interacting with people we have just met. We encroach on personal spaces and trespass on what would normally be ‘no go areas’. It is, as I write, ‘awkward’ and ‘embarrassing’. Various participants (including myself) break into nervous laughter from time to time. We laugh for at least two reasons: because of the shock that comes from the sudden recognition of exactly what we have been asked to do; and because it is a useful way of concealing our inadequacy. These activities seemed to be the most challenging, because we were not used to interacting so closely with what in effect were strangers. In retrospect, what such exercises did, was enable many of us to overcome social shyness, by permitting us - in those few minutes - to be so direct with one another.

The first thing to recognise in exercise three, is the fact that Harry and Susie is centred on these same propensities and needs: i.e., the effectiveness of the play rests on the conveyance of the personal stories and life experiences of participants. While the writing of names in the exercise allows participants to get to know each other, the act of doing so reveals a complex web of sensitivities. For many participants, their name is not simply ‘a name’, but a
symbol of their identity, of who they are. It is therefore not surprising that the process produced a rich narrative that symbolically represented their lives, experiences and aspirations. Such aspects, were not only crucial in the construction of Harry and Susie, but also demanded an almost Artaudian confrontation of the self.\(^5\) The second point I'd like to make ties in with that aforementioned, and concerns the reality that throughout the workshop, I felt largely like a 'peeping Tom'. After watching countless participants sharing their innermost feelings, I was touched by the fact that they could say these things in front of me. My initial introduction had yielded nothing about my status as a researcher but simply as 'some one interested in theatre and keen to learn from the whole workshop experience'. It seemed, however, that everyone that had been affected by addiction/alcoholism had said so. Ironically, neither myself, Donna or Michelle indicated that we were addicts/alcoholics, which was in itself enough for the rest of the group to ascertain that we were not.

In this context, the ethics of the workshop are highly questionable. Firstly, by neglecting to warn participants (from the offset) of the nature of the project - i.e., that they would be involved in the construction of a play which centred on the lives of addicts/alcoholics and that there would be others involved that were not addicts/alcoholics, etc - Phil has also neglected to tell participants exactly what they would be committing themselves to. And secondly, in being involved in the workshops, participants disclosed personal and private information to people they did not know. While the facilitator stressed to all participants that 'confidentiality' was of the utmost importance, he had placed many in a very vulnerable position. Furthermore, participants would have been completely justified in rejecting to my own, Michelle and Donna's

\(^5\) Antonin Artaud, a visionary and theatre practitioner who believed that theatre should be capable of confronting man/woman with the true self. In essence, the spectator would experience his/her unconscious, evil side and in so doing, be 'purged' and 'cleansed' of it.

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presence in the workshop. This could, after all, be equated with a psychoanalyst permitting our entry into a group therapy session.

In the excerpt below, I contemplate the significance of day one, and what we can expect from the next:

<table>
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<th>‘And the Significance?’</th>
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<tr>
<td>(Time: 4.25pm)</td>
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<td>As this first day draws to a close, I ponder over the significance of past events. For example, Phil’s efforts to seemingly throw us in at the deep end; the various exercises (which continued throughout the day), that differed in content but not in purpose - that being to get to know one another. Now, as I sit with a bunch of keys in my hand, the entire room is silent. No one else can speak whilst I am in possession of these keys, ‘group rules’. I must now ponder aloud. Share my thoughts of the day with my newly found friends. Darren had made a desperate leap for these keys minutes before Michael - a participant who came to join us this afternoon and has increased our eight strong band to nine. They both had very positive things to say about this first day. Darren first, then Michael second. What did I have to say? It is now I remember a conversation I had with Rehan at lunch. For him, the object of the workshop, contemplated as an opportunity to develop and master the great skill of acting, seemed to be shrinking. The clear objectives he’d expected to achieve had become difficult to see at this point in time: “It feels like therapy”, he had expressed disappointedly. “When will the acting begin”? Never perhaps as he’d conceived it, but maybe in some other way...</td>
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The significance of day one, and as such, of the various exercises, is in enabling participants to get to know one another. In further allowing the participants to connect and bond with each other, such exercises also reinforced a sense of ‘play’ and challenged participants to overcome inhibitions and shyness. I would suggest, however, that the general approach adopted by the facilitator, the language and wording he chose when introducing the exercises, directly affected the way in which such activities were perceived. Thus while the exercises did not call for ‘creative’ or ‘artistic’ input from participants, the primary experience participants - for example, Rehan - obtained from them was therapeutic. In continuing
exploration of the efficacy of the workshop, I now turn to day two. Here, I shall look more closely at the process of play and will also consider the relevance of the textual and symbolic mapping exercises.

Day 2

‘The Process of Play: Building Trust’

(Time: 4.25pm)
I had had a feeling from the start of today that things would prove quite intense. We began with some trust exercises...

Exercise 1
Select a partner. Take turns in transporting partner around the room with their eyes closed. As partner and you grow more confident with a controlled pace, take pace up slightly. Repeat exercise, experimenting with pace, direction etc.

Exercise 2
Form a large circle. Allocate one person to take a journey around the circle with their eyes closed. Those who make up the circle guide this person around by first receiving them, and then passing them on to someone else. The point is to maintain eye contact with the person receiving the participant, so that if you are selected as the person they send the participant on to, you are ready to receive them and can ensure that they reach you safely.

Exercise 3
A participant is selected to lie on the floor, again with their eyes closed. The remaining group place themselves evenly on either side of the participant. Slowly lift participant above head level and transport carefully around the room.

... I remember feeling uncomfortable from the offset of the trust exercises, and that part of my uneasiness could be attributed to the presence of Connie, the counsellor attached to Outside Edge. I remember, also, struggling to disengage myself from the reason she was here: but the thought of the workshop possibly, inevitably, dragging up the pasts of participants, wouldn’t leave me. In fact, Connie was here today to introduce herself,
nothing else. Still, her presence plagued me. Also here for the first time was Amanda. She was from London Arts and here to document the project. Phil had taken the time to introduce her as such, and I was perturbed by this fact. Why had it not been necessary for Amanda to adopt the persona of a participant? Both Connie and Phil joined in with the exercises. Amanda sat with her competent hands in her lap observing. As far as I could tell, none of the other participants were bothered by Amanda’s inclusion. This, I decided, was a good thing.

The principal goal of the exercises was, I believe to create unity and trust amongst us. There was no doubt that all of the tasks commanded a high degree of trust, and slowly, all of the participants were earning mine. As Michelle, my partner, had gently but persuasively guided me through the first exercise, I felt a strange sense of confidence, a certainty that I would be escorted around safely. I was more comfortable with the fact that we were both women. And though I was still a little awkward, my awkwardness was not further compounded by the strange intimacies and alienations that had been operating in my teaming with Rehan and Leon the day before. In terms of the second exercise, I am humbled when I consider the delicacy with which each participant was handled. It was a warming experience. I did not participate in the final activity. That is, not fully. I had been keen to help carry participants around the room, but cowered at the very thought of myself being transported. Even now I hear the voices of participants edging me on: “Go on Yvonne, it’s really ok”, they urge. But it had all been in vain, I was not going to do it: “I don’t like heights”, I explained. I hadn’t wanted them to think it was because I didn’t trust them - I could see the hurt in their faces. Thinking about it now, I wish I had, scared of heights or not. We had all been experiencing things together; new things, together. This would have been a natural progression, but effectively I have blown them out; kicked them to the curb; thrown egg in their faces. They didn’t go on for long though. I think they really knew I meant no malice. And if I’m really honest, knowing the way I feel now - the way it pains me to think that I might have offended them - is testament enough of the bonds forged.

Research Diary 05.09.00

As I write in the extract, one of the main aims of the exercises is to encourage unity and trust amongst participants. The process by which bonds are forged is characteristically subjective. It rests on an understanding of the interaction of complementary impulses: an impulse to protect, and an impulse to rescue. It is worth observing that an appreciation of the aforementioned impulses, always rests with the person in control of the activity. So in exercise one, this
would be the person leading a participant throughout the surrounding area; in exercise two, those guiding a participant around the circle, etc. Thus, trust must lie with the participant involved in the various exercises. Since the exercises have already been outlined in the passage, there is no need for me to describe each activity here. I am more interested in what happened after each exercise, notably the participant's dissection of how each activity made them feel. This entailed deep, meditative reflection. Almost a burrowing into the self in order to reveal what was happening inside. We made the unconscious conscious, and in the process of doing so, came closer to understanding our own feelings. As each participant communicated how each exercise made them feel, Phil would sometimes intervene, almost reiterate what had been said. Occasionally, participants would see this as a sign to elaborate, clearly pleased their revelations had struck a chord. If you were not 'sharing', then you listened, carefully, supportively, until it was your turn.

Whilst the above sounds more like a group therapy session than a theatre workshop, we need to understand why this is largely the case. Clearly, the project Harry and Susie demands a particular style of facilitation that is reflective of its aim and philosophy. At its core, is the idea that in the telling and retelling of participants' experiences, the story of Harry and Susie acquires more force and potency. The facilitator's style then, is largely dictated by the characteristics and demands of the project. However, the project in question is equally an artistic venture. And as such, also commands a creative framework with which to explore the biographies and experiences of participants. The impulse behind the tasks explored so far would seem less aesthetic than therapeutic. A fact further compounded by the presence of Connie, whose inclusion - though instructive - served to reinforce the remedial overtones of the workshop. Indeed, as I will demonstrate in the following brainstorming and symbolic mapping activities, the temptation to
hone in on the therapeutic aspect of the workshop, becomes evident in the paucity of artistic input:

**‘Brainstorming and Symbolic Mapping’**

(Time: 11.45am)
Connie dashed off for some appointment or another, Phil decided we should brainstorm themes of addiction. He presented us with a large piece of paper and a pen: "Right, so who wants to write", Phil had asked inquisitively, though he had looked at no one in particular. Well it was not going to be me. Word had already got around of my ‘true identity’. How sickening it would have been to have ‘Miss Yvonne PhD student’ manning the pen. No, it was not going to be me: “Well I can’t read or write”, somebody had said. An awkward silence and then: “Oh go on then, I’ll do it”, said Michelle, the dancer, who I also understood was training for an academic qualification.

Research Diary 05.09.00

In deciding that participants should brainstorm themes of addiction, the facilitator directs: “Right, so who wants to write”? There follows an uncomfortable silence that often accompanies such requests, in which time three 'visible' participants are put in the frame. If we consider the potential candidates in line for the job of 'writer', we are confronted by the stark disparities between them - a point equally transferable to the entire group. There is myself, a practising researcher in the field; there is Michelle, a pragmatist and dancer, also 'training for an academic qualification'; and lastly, there is the participant - who for obvious reasons shall remain anonymous - who candidly expresses, "I can’t read or write". Participatory theatre is typically characterised by an 'all inclusive doctrine'. This principle is based on the classical concept of participation in which integration and involvement is predominant. But what this 'all embracing doctrine' fails to take into account, is that when the fusion of very different people - in terms of class, educational ability, religion, ethnicity, etc - occurs, there is often fragmentation.
As one might expect, since the workshop is so central to the participatory process, it falls prey to the same kinds of criticisms. Indeed, for participants, the problems become manifest in a number of ways. The first that I shall consider relates back to the illiterate participant, who, because of this fact, is effectively excluded from fully taking part in the brainstorming exercise. Whilst, in all fairness, no one reacts adversely to this revelation - and I suspect there were one or two other participants who may have been illiterate - this oversight could have been largely avoided. As co-ordinator of the workshop, Phil was able to exercise autonomy in his choice of activities. The range of exercises/activities appropriate should, therefore, not only reflect an ethos of inclusion, but also the aesthetic and emotional content of the initiative. But all of this ties in with the fact that we were collectively treated as ‘participants’. As such, all of our values, and all of our discriminations and assessments of values, are perceived to be shared by all.

The offshoots of this ‘collective grouping’ often splintered into awkward situations, one of which is the basis of my second point. On the first day of the initiative, Phil directed the following question at participants: “Can all participants needing money for travel and lunch expenses, please see me now”. An obvious response from myself at least, was well, does this include me? Judging by the blank expressions on other participants’ faces - notably Michelle, Gary, Darren and Donna, the four actors/actresses - they were equally perplexed. The picture derived from Phil’s question then, a very vague, uncertain and indeterminate one. I thus decline the offer. Subsequently, at lunch with Rehan and Benny that day, Rehan - having learnt that I did not receive money for lunch or travel - boldly asks why I had not gone up to see Phil? The tone of his question seemed to imply both, that I felt I was above taking money to cover expenses; and an awkwardness on his part because he had. This in turn made me feel uncomfortable, and slightly
perturbed by Phil’s failing to realise the implications of his deceptively simple statement.

The same tendency can be seen in the merging of participants to produce one narrative, when ultimately only one distinctive voice - that is, other than the writer’s - is heard: that of the addict/alcoholic. But I shall return to this point shortly. There are now, other considerations relating to the process of brainstorming and symbolic mapping which will provide such an argument with context. Let us return now, to the point in the narrative where Michelle has just offered her skills as a writer:

(Time: 11.45am)
Secretly I think Michelle was thoroughly enjoying the task as she seemed to get so much satisfaction from dictating what would actually be written down. It was simple. If Michelle heard and agreed with the word being suggested, she would write it down. If she did not, she would not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Relationships and Addiction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex deceit lies using porn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Selfishness unsociable low morale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clucking loneliness craving dependency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boredom promiscuity perverseness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jealousy love habit arguments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hate abuse paranoia secrets denial</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Brainstorming is integral to the process. A theme is highlighted and participants discuss spontaneous ideas about it, as illustrated above. Once again, Phil assumes the role of activist, ‘encouraging’, ‘coaxing’ - ‘activating’ participants. At the end of the process, he often asks: “Is the story complete, or is there any thing more to the story of addiction”? A signal that participants
must keep going, and they do, feverishly, excitedly. Brainstorming is a vital means through which Phil as writer attempts to get to grips with the context of the play. The story expressed thus far, would seem to be characterised by 'lies', 'loneliness', 'craving', 'dependency' - with only the slightest trace of 'love'. It is a story then, bound to induce strong emotions. Emotions born out of the spontaneous debate of addiction. In response to how the process affected me and other participants, I write:

(Time: 2.30pm)
Gradually as the paper gorged with words, I felt myself full with an uncontrollable sadness. I look at the participants, Rehan, Benny, Michael, Darren, Gary and Leon - they are sad also, but there is something else. From their voices I understand that they are both ashamed and proud of their vital contributions. Spontaneous suggestions are offered - 'porn', 'abuse', 'using' - with hardly a moments pause. They are on a roll. I have yet to make one suggestion - I am out of my league. I vow to leave it to the experts. And that is exactly what most of the participants are - practised, proficient, qualified beings once dependent on alcohol and/or drugs. This process had enabled the valuing of the once devalued; those who at some point in their lives had assumed they forfeited the right to be treated as fellow human beings. Now they were effectively dictating what any story about addiction should say, more eloquently, more authentically than any actor/actress. The story of dependency - on drugs or on alcohol - is not however pretty. And that is why my mood was so effected, so low.
Research Diary 05.09.00

Thus, it seems that whilst my mood is 'so low', many of the other participants, though sad also, are visibly less affected. Perhaps it is knowing that it is 'their' experiences - however painful - that would be of abiding importance to the content of Harry and Susie. Note also, that not one suggestion is made by myself, and very little is heard from Michelle or Donna. A fact, I suspect, connected to us feeling we had very little to give to the play.
Day 3

‘Brainstorming and Symbolic Mapping’ (Part 2)
(Time: 12.00pm)
The art of brainstorming was pursued well into the third day of the workshop. The process was repeated so that different possibilities were explored. These are the themes generated by the word marriage.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marriage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adultery, loneliness, bliss, contentment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Love, companionship, sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children, secrets, lies,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deceit, unfaithfulness, respect</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research Diary 06.09.00

There is a marked difference in the process by which we brainstormed the theme of marriage. Whilst Michelle again pursues the role of writer, and whilst everyone, again, seems fine with this, the exercise takes on a distinctively different feel. It is perhaps sensible to see this being due to the fact that every one played an active role. Whilst it was the case that many participants could not claim to have a first hand knowledge of the theme being brainstormed, it was still broad enough to enlist a response from all. When the sheet was full, Phil as writer was able to ascertain that the relationship between husband and wife is an extremely tense affair, and as such, potentially unstable.

Also revisited in day three, is the symbolic mapping exercise which first began in day two of the workshop. Phil had encouraged participants to map their own life stories in the form of a picture. We had been instructed to
sketch our life stories from the day we were born up to the present. We were then given the choice as to whether or not we would take the rest of the group through our pictorial narratives, revealing where necessary, the symbolism displayed. Constraints on time meant that only Gary and Michael were able to share their life stories. In the extract below, I reflect on how hearing them make me feel:

‘Pictorial Life Stories’
(Time: 4.25pm)
I have just finished listening to two harrowing accounts of the life so far lived by two participants in this room. I will never again look at them in the same way. As much as I tried to maintain the cool exterior of the detached researcher, I found listening to their life stories very disturbing. Most of today, because of this obsession with keeping focused, my thoughts have ironically remained obscure and misty. I fight hard to keep my emotions to one side and concentrate on the bigger picture. But it is hard, very hard.

Research Diary 05.09.00

An obstacle to appreciating the artistic content of the symbolic mapping exercise, is the marked and very forceful emphasis on the emotional. By this, I mean that while the exercise contained creative elements - i.e., the fact that participants were required to symbolically sketch the story of their life - these were masked by the facilitator’s calling for participants to ‘analyse’ the maps and ‘relay’ to others the meaning behind their use of imagery. While it was left to the discretion of participants as to whether they would choose to share their biographies, the decision not to, seemed to project - in my understanding - a distancing of oneself from the rest of the group. I suggest in the narrative how hearing both Gary and Michael’s life stories made me feel. But an even bigger stumbling block, would be the act of actually revealing my own pictorial narrative. As expressed before however, time restrictions would mean that I could delay any decision making until day three. I knew, however, that it would be very difficult for me not to take part in the exercise. I had forged quite strong bonds with many participants. We were a community, and as such, were seen to digest the experiences and life
choices/styles of our members. To not share my life story would be to effectively shun that community. Could I do this?

‘Pictorial Life Stories’ (Part2)
(Time: 2.30pm)
It is now 2.30pm and all but three participants have shared their life stories. Two of them simply opting not to, the other claiming to have left his map at home. I have learnt that for some participants, the only role (in real life) they believed they would ever be able to play wholeheartedly was that of an addict/alcoholic. It sounds melodramatic, but life really has been cruel to them. For some, it was sexual abuse that tipped them over the edge; for some, simply isolation. Others spoke of life as children being a struggle against death which lurked at every corner; whilst others, violently abusive parents. Clean-time, which was to bring clarity and a sense of worth, had not yet freed them from the torment of memory; it had not even filled them with hope. What is interesting is that some participants said that this process has - filled them with hope that is. Nearly all express an interest in theatre and I think being included in the theatrical process - their personal stories and life experience providing firm foundations for the creation of the play - has gone some way in restoring their sense of worth and self-respect.
Research Diary 06.09.00

Let us first consider the two participants who chose not to share their life stories, and the significance of this to the rest of the group. The motivating forces behind Donna and Michelle’s decisions should not be frowned upon. They arose - I later find - out of a concern that their life stories would have little or no relevance in constructing Harry and Susie. It is here, that one of the points made earlier is worth reconsidering. I noted that the ‘merging of participants’ to produce one narrative suggests that each participant will be embedded in the multiple contexts of Harry and Susie. The reality of the situation however, is that one voice (other than the writer’s) is heard - that of the addict/alcoholic. In taking this into account, surely two things can be said. Firstly, as participants, we do not act from the same ‘subject positions’ but from our own ‘subject position’. Secondly, and more fundamentally, the inclusion of non-addicts/alcoholics in this phase can be seen to reinforce a feeling of seperatedness, and not belonging.
Many of the participants were disappointed that neither Donna or Michelle took part in the activity. A feeling most vehemently expressed by Darren, who saw this as “a big cop out!” And yet, this was a decision I, myself could have made. The reason I chose to share my life story was through fear that I might offend or hurt the other participants. I was not, however, under any illusion that my doing so would provide the writer with fodder for the play.

What I find particularly illuminating about the process of symbolic mapping, is the way in which it seemed to affirm the place of many participants. In fact, at the risk of sounding contradictory, I would suggest that it is precisely through the recounting of ‘harrowing’, heart-felt experiences, that participants were able to narrate a sense of worth and self respect.

Day 4

It may seem now, that we have reached the position of claiming that the definitive starting point for Harry and Susie was from inside. The various exercises fostered a particular kind of mental/emotional response from participants, which while proving necessary for the construction of Harry and Susie, was also potentially damaging for the participants. In this way, the facilitator’s decision to include Connie on the last day of the workshop is vital. In fact, it is paradoxical that while part of the final day is specifically allocated to the counsellor, the other part would see the artistic component of the workshop finally being utilised.

‘The Process of Improvisation’
(Time: 10.30am)
The fruits of our three-day labour were now ready to be harvested. Phil instructs that elements of the stories relayed and issues brainstormed shall be used for theatrical exploration. The transition from image to theatre is now possible. We begin improvising scenes from our own biographies and boundaries between the real and the fictitious become blurred. As we
improvise, Phil watches us closely, occasionally looking away to jot things down. Which of our stories made for ‘good’ theatre, I wonder?
Research Diary 07.09.00

Important to us, is an understanding of how improvisation is used to engage with themes generated in the brainstorming and symbolic mapping activities. As a theatrical tool, improvisation is a useful means of highlighting a particular theme or essential dramatic situation. Phil organised participants into two groups of three (Benny, Gary and myself) and one group of two (Leon and Darren), allocating them half an hour to work on improvisations. This involved choosing a scenario that everyone in the group agreed on and also rehearsing the scene. Participants would then perform the piece - lasting no longer than two minutes - to the other participants. Below (see box 6.1) is an outline of the improvisation Benny, Gary and myself constructed:

**Box 6.1: ‘An Improvisation’**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enactment</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two children are at home. They are between the ages of four and five years old and sit playing with some toys. They are smiling and laughing and appear engrossed in each other’s company. Suddenly, the front door burst open. It is the children’s father. He is home and in a drunken fury. He looks at the children and roars: WHAT THE FUCK YOU LOOKING AT! He then proceeds to enter the kitchen where he demands from the children’s mother: GIVE ME SOME MONEY! GIVE ME THE FUCKING MONEY!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**End of Scene.**

In terms of the group I was in, selecting the scenario fell largely on the hands of Benny and Gary. While I became more instructive in ‘theatricalizing’ the enactment, Benny and Gary’s life stories offered more potential in relation to the possible content of Harry and Susie. The germs of the scenario emerged through Benny and Gary’s recounting of pivotal events they had experienced as children, events which, on all accounts seemed to have left a lasting affect on the participants. Once the main themes of the scenario were made apparent, the creative work could begin. The idea - as relayed to participants by Phil - was that participants would work on the objectives of their characters - their motivations, and on ‘dramatising’ the scenes. Benny and I would take
on the roles of the two siblings and Gary, the abusive father. Both Benny and Gary had clear ideas about their character motivations and how the characters should come across in performance. Since the chosen scenario was an amalgam of their own life stories, I was happy for Benny and Gary to direct me in terms of how my character should be portrayed. It was decided that the overriding sense of the siblings that should come across to the audience was their innocence, fragility, and the fact that they were very young. The only emotion the father was to display was 'anger'.

More generally, our group resolved that all character portrayals should be realistic. However, it was also decided that certain parts of the scene would be stylised (for example, the occasions where the father shouts would be slow and drawn out). During performances, Phil was seen jotting things down in a note pad. As the writer he was able to deliberately manipulate the ideas he wanted to follow up. After the performances, each participant was given a chance to reflect on the experience. Many of the participants expressed how good it was to actually 'perform' in the pieces, and spoke of it building confidence and confirming that they wanted to continue working with 'theatre' in the future. Many participants also expressed how 'powerful' it had been to watch participants portray issues which had been pertinent to their own lives. Such feelings had also been tinged with sadness.

In the ensuing passage, participants can be seen taking on the role of focus groups, advising Phil as to the direction Harry and Susie should take:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'Ideas for Harry and Susie'</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Time: 1.30pm)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over the past few days I have often contemplated what this workshop could be about. Now, I don't think about that anymore; I don't even feel the need to ask such questions. I just go with the flow. It is ironic that when I stop asking, we are now told. Phil shares with us the skeleton of an idea he has for the play. He says he knows he wants it to be about the complexities that</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
exist between addicts/alcoholics, and their partners, who may also be addicts/alcoholics. He then tells us that the play will be called *Harry and Susie Get Married?*, and asks casually: "What do you want the play to say - who should it speak to"? Some are adamant that Susie should not be an addict, that she should instead be the saving grace that redeems Harry from his addiction. Other participants believe the total opposite should be portrayed. It is exciting for everyone to see the play, our play, coming together.

***

We continued to hammer out ideas for *Harry and Susie* well into the early afternoon. Phil being primarily concerned that the play is truthful and that - as far as possible - those that would eventually come and see the play, would not resent and/or suffer as a result of its content.

Research Diary 07.09.00

I sit now facing, among others, Connie, who, as promised has come to listen to us air our views on what this four-day workshop has meant to us. Many have spoken of the courage of others, their willingness to explore difficult issues for the 'sake of an art form'. They have been touched by the support shown to them, and the strong bonds they have forged. As each participant speaks, a marked feeling of camaraderie binds us. For me, who at certain times during the week have struggled with the belief I had nothing to give, I realise I have given my all. The participatory process, which contrasts sharply with the traditional theatre process - i.e., playwright writes play, director casts it and actors/actresses perform it as it is written - has enabled us to give. Participants were given a voice and effectively became the experts in the construction of *Harry and Susie*. By peripherally focusing on personal truths, life experience, the participatory process enhanced both personal and group development, whilst, if only in a marginal way, alerting us to the aesthetics of theatrical production.

Research Diary 07.09.00

To conclude, then, the principal aim of the workshop has been to construct, through an emphasis on the personal and collective stories of participants, the content of *Harry and Susie*. Construction of *Harry and Susie* has been divided into three main areas: the process of play, textual and symbolic mapping and improvisation. Exploration of these activities revealed how participants were able to establish effective bonds and negotiate differences. Such activities also provided the basis for personal and group development. The style and
content of the workshop, however - in responding to the 'emotional' and personal nature of the project - was largely therapeutic. Thus, rather than a site in which both the artistic and therapeutic were able to function, the workshop was primarily a space of healing and therapy.

**Part Two - The Feed-back Session**

In part two I explore the natural growth and development of Harry and Susie as it occurred in the one-day feed-back session. On the final day of the (four-day) workshop, participants had been told that they would be needed in the second phase of the programme. The one-day feed-back session would be an opportunity for the writer - having, as a result of the workshop and additional one to one meetings with some participants, begun writing the first draft for Harry and Susie - to liaise with participants about any issues arising from the drafted script. In practical terms, the feed-back session was designed to validate the data secured in the workshop, whilst itself acting as a further means through which the data could be constructed. The involvement of participants in this stage would thus seem crucial. Not only would they be required to generate new vision and meaning in Harry and Susie, but they would also prove a vital means of authenticating the play text. In this section, I examine the ways in which the feed-back session provided further participative opportunities by allowing participants to express their ideas and feelings in relation to the effectiveness of Harry and Susie. I emphasise the ways in which participants bring important insights to the session through sharing and testing ideas for the drafted script and through further commenting on the authenticity of Harry and Susie. At the same time, however, I question these opportunities by revealing how certain visions of Harry and Susie come to be privileged by the writer, and thus how certain voices come to be heard. The term 'authenticity' will become central to such arguments, as I emphasise the tensions between 'truth' or 'reality', and artistic quality.
I begin by acquainting the reader with the events occurring immediately after the workshop phase.

6.3 The Feed-back Session: Development

6.3.1 From the Workshop to the Feed-back Session

My writing of this section was inspired by a one to one meeting with Phil, in which we discussed the relevance of the one-day feed-back session. The following extract, while setting the scene in which our encounter takes place, seeks to give the reader a sense of the events taking place after the workshop:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>‘The Coffee House’</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>(Time: 2.30pm)</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| The scene is a coffee-house set on a trendy suburban road. There is a regal looking mat placed in its entrance and a ‘made to look old’ wooden coat stand just a little further in. Inside there is an inevitable aroma of coffee. I am sitting at a table discussing the one-day feed-back session with Phil. It is good to see him again. It is the first time since the workshop. He tells me that a couple of days after the workshop, he had had one to one meetings with two of the participants. For one reason or another, they hadn’t had the chance to relay their life stories fully. They felt they had more to say. It was good to know they had been given the chance. There is a pause as Phil takes a sip from his coffee. As he continues, I am aware that the man behind the counter is watching us furtively. As I return my attentions to Phil, he is telling me that it had been very useful going back to the material generated in the four days and remind himself of the various contexts in which the ideas had been constructed. He seemed very keen, almost intrigued by this. I decide to ask him how he is finding writing the play and am pleasantly surprised to hear that it is largely complete. For Phil, the writing process had begun with the knowledge that he would be returning to The Munster for one last feed-back session. But it had also been important for him to honour his own intentions for the play. He gazes into his near empty cup and says confidently: “I knew from the beginning I wanted Susie to be

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6 I was unable to attend the one-day workshop and thus arranged a meeting with Phil. The meeting was based around events of the feed-back session and what the writer had hoped to obtain from this further encounter with participants.
Black”. I wondered what had prompted his particular choice of who Susie should be. But then remember that he had commented on the first day of the workshop about the low turnout of women in rehab, and the even lower proportion of these being ‘Black’ women. Phil knew of ‘Black’ women who were users and he wanted to try and tell part of their story. I deduced then, that much of the content of *Harry and Susie* had invariably come from Phil’s own experiences. As he spoke however, it was clear too, that many of the speeches he had written for characters, were taken directly from the stories participants had told.

**Research Diary 16.10.00**

In the days immediately succeeding the four-day workshop, the writer had found himself with vast amounts of materials. These were essentially primary data that had been inspired at different stages of the workshop, and by specific ideas. It was useful for the writer to revisit such material. In doing so, he was able to remind himself of the various contexts in which the ideas had been formulated. Once this had been completed the writer was free to begin the writing process. The degree of freedom possible when writing for participatory theatre, however, is severely hampered by the restrictions of ‘Forum’ (see again the introduction to this chapter, which outlines the main characteristics of forum). The challenge imposed by the dictates of forum, is a subject the writer became more than familiar with. Thus, from the inception of *Harry and Susie*, Phil knew that Susie - the main character - had to be oppressed, and the play itself would have to have a negative end. This was a concern for Phil as he explains:

> ‘I was really disappointed that I had to take the play to a certain place’.  

The more creative aspects of forum - which, in the context of *Harry and Susie* refers to parts of the play designed to be entertaining - also demanded special attention. As such, the writer had to be alert to possible episodes within the play that would, when enacted, provoke the desired response. After taking all of the above into consideration, Phil explained that he was able

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7 Meeting with Phil Fox, 2000.
to return to The Munster with a near to completed draft. He then described the feed-back session to me.

6.3.2 The Feed-back Session: Participation, Authenticity and Artistic Quality

Returning to The Munster studio, the writer had taken with him eight copies of the first draft. Three quarters of the way complete, Harry and Susie was in need of an ending. By the close of the one-day workshop, the story of Harry and Susie would read like the lives of (some) of the participants, softened and given a not so grim conclusion. Below (see box 6.2) is a short synopsis of the play:

Box 6.2: ‘A Synopsis of Harry and Susie’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Harry and Susie Get Married?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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| Susie - drug addict and alcoholic - fresh out of treatment with a new life starting, is scared. She has no job and is haunted by guilt and the past. The guilt is from having an affair with her friend Pauline’s husband - Nick, the dealer. The past is her father, a chronic alcoholic, now on a psychiatric ward. When Susie was old enough she moved away from her father and they’d lost touch. Now, Susie endeavours to keep clean. She embarks on a self-help group, where she meets Harry. Harry has been clean for nearly six months. They immediately enter into a relationship, one that is plagued by ill omens. The relationship continues despite of this and Susie tries to make things up with the bitter Pauline. They arrange to meet at a fair in Brockwell Park. Both Nick and Harry are invited. Yet it is all in vain, Susie’s apologies fall on Pauline’s deaf ears. Nick, ignorant of the pain he has caused Pauline, is keen for Susie to do a job for him. The favour would be returned in an envelope containing details of the whereabouts of Susie’s father. Desperate to see her father, Susie does the job and in doing so is at once tormented by an insatiable urge to use. Harry wants to get married, and Susie is keen. But events take a turn for the worst. Susie is rejected by her father and Harry starts using. Her sadness seems only lessened by the ability of herself to use. Tragically, Pauline commits suicide and Susie is left again, ravaged by guilt. Though still in love with Harry, their relationship is an abusive one. Susie convinces herself that the only way things can get better is by once again seeking out therapy.

Protagonists:

Susie - Michelle
Gary - Harry
Phil had articulated to me that participants had been encouraged to understand the first draft as an expression of 'potentially' relevant theatre. Its effectiveness would be discovered through further group discussion. Participants had also been encouraged to comment on the believability of characters, and to state whether they felt they represented the truthful voice of ex/recovering addicts/alcoholics and their partners. By the time of the session, Phil had known exactly which of the actors and actresses would play each character in Harry and Susie. It had been his prerogative, however, to instruct Gary, Michelle, Darren and Donna to read through the script, taking turns to read the different parts. This seemed to be instructive in three main ways: Firstly, it ensured that no participant would be clearly excluded from group activity. This had been the case in the brainstorming exercises in the workshop phase, where the participant who could not read was excluded from participating as fully as they might have wished. Secondly, Phil would be able to confirm whether the actors/actresses have been correctly cast. And thirdly, potential issues relating to the script could be revealed.

As an outcome of reading through the draft, some participants argued that the play was 'too working class'. The participants had felt that by telling the story of addiction only as it occurs in a working class context, Phil was inadvertently saying that addiction/alcoholism did not effect the middle classes. This was a myth I knew Phil himself was only too happy to dispel, as he had explained to me in an interview:

"It's interesting because I feel that, it [addiction/alcoholism] seems like a working class thing, like it's perceived as a working class problem, with associations of economic deprivation. And I think that there is a statistical corollary between that, but I think that the middle classes and the upper classes are just as affected... I think they have other ways of managing, they can go to private treatment centres,
they can have private, professional help, so they don’t come into the statistics”.

Coming from a working class background himself, Phil had communicated to me that telling the story of addiction, as it occurs in working class communities, was very important to him. He agreed, however, that characters, whose presence in the play had been to serve as gauges for neutrality - such as Pauline and Nick - tended to be overshadowed by the working class plight. In this way, a number of suggestions were made regarding what and how the script might be altered in order to be more sensitive to the possible class divisions within prospective audiences. In the case of Pauline, Phil decided to make the character ‘more overtly’ middle class. For Nick, this meant making the character more ambiguous, so that he was not identified with any particular class.

As the content of Harry and Susie revealed that it was also a play that indulged in adult themes, Phil was also concerned to discuss the cut off age of potential audiences. Did, for example, parts of the script need to be censored so as to communicate more effectively to a younger audience? Once these and various other issues had been taken on board, the only thing that had to be decided, was how the play should end? The constraints of forum meant that the culmination of Harry and Susie would essentially be a negative one. With this in mind, participants agreed that whilst the audience should be confronted with Susie’s relapse, they should also be given a chance at the end of the show to change this.

It is clear, then, that the feed-back session has provided participants with further opportunities to participate in the creative process of playmaking. In this way, participants have expressed their own opinions and ideas about the effectiveness of Harry and Susie, a play that they have had an equally functional

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8 Interview, Phil Fox, 2000.
role in constructing. Mattingly (2001) has argued that such involvement offers possibilities of transcending the representational constraints of academia, by offering participants more power over the representation of their voices. Furthermore, in bringing important contributions to the one-day workshop, the participants can also be seen as providing a supplementary source of data to that which has been previously constructed in the 'workshop phase'.

I would also argue, however, that the degree to which participants were involved in the feed-back session was largely determined by the writer. For example - and from what I have gathered from Phil's explanations - from the moment of inception, certain aspects of Harry and Susie were firmly fixed. Aspects such as Susie's ethnicity were fixed because the writer wanted to tell a particular story. Similarly, castings for the play had already been carried out, and actors/actresses for the various parts, chosen by the writer. The feed-back session was equally driven by the writer's focus: the believability of characters, the authenticity of the play text, etc. In terms of the group discussions, then, participants were not at liberty to follow a natural course of expression - that is, conversations were not 'free-flowing' - but were instead constrained by the issues of focus.

The main issue, as mentioned previously, centred on the authenticity of Harry and Susie, which in itself merits closer scrutiny. It follows that while Harry and Susie was based on the autobiographical stories of participants, only certain stories - and thus 'voices' - came to be heard. From my perspective, the writer's decision to include certain voices in Harry and Susie, was tied to the tension between presenting truth and what made for 'good' theatre - that is, performance which would be deemed as 'stimulating', 'moving' and 'powerful'. This, as we have seen, is a recurring issue within community theatre: meeting both the 'participative' and 'artistic' aims of projects. It is a problem we encountered in our exploration of the Bubble, and which
continues to pose a fundamental dilemma to theatre in the community companies.

For Outside Edge, meeting the participative objectives of the company meant that in the feedback session participants were able to contribute something unique to the writer’s own vision of Harry and Susie, and in the workshop phase, they were able to relay genuine emotions and experiences. Ultimately, however, satisfying the artistic aims of the company meant that the writer would go through a process of selecting, merging and dramatising such narratives (see Fortier, 1997: 124), which in turn meant that the final piece would not be truly authentic, and the participants ability to define themselves, would not be complete. In the next section, I examine how active participation in the performance of Harry and Susie offered participants more ability to use their ‘own voices’ and in this way, challenge their own realities.

**Part Three - Performing *Harry and Susie Get Married?*: Forum theatre and (Empowering) Community**

In this final section, I consider the ways in which Outside Edge’s participatory production of *Harry and Susie* can be seen as a critical means of challenging reality and of changing a way of life. The argument that I make is that active participation - that is, when participants (‘spect-actors’) watch as critical as opposed to passive observers and (in the ‘turn-around’ performance) they take on the role of main protagonist - can be seen to yield a sense of empowering community. Empowering community in the context of *Harry and Susie* refers to the state in which spectators became wholly engaged in theatrical performance - which (to varying degrees) mirrors their own reality - and are moved to take collective ‘revolutionary’ action. The ideal of ‘revolutionary theatre’ ultimately derives from Augusto Boal’s ‘Theatre of the Oppressed’ (see introduction to this chapter), where theatre is a weapon for revolution and those involved in performance can explore options which must
then be tested in life. In this section, I explore the ways in which Harry and Susie became a vehicle for changing audiences' perceptions of themselves and their life choices. In doing so, I also reflect on the associations between the production of Harry and Susie and Boal's blueprint for theatre.

Before I contemplate the revolutionary possibilities of Harry and Susie, however, I attempt - by returning to the working field diary - to briefly trace what happened in the interim leading up to the performances of Harry and Susie. In this way, the third and final phase will be placed in relation to the participatory process:

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**'Rehearsals'**

Within two weeks I had observed rehearsals for Harry and Susie. During this time, I was most impressed by Phil, who had fully metamorphosed from writer to director and had charismatically urged actors/actresses to get inside their character's heads. He did this by using strategies to help them achieve a sense of identity for their character's, through improvisational exercises and role-play. On returning to The Munster, I had, out of curiosity wondered how many of the other participants would take up Phil's offer and come along to rehearsals. He had explained, at the end of the feedback session that he would be keen to continue taking on board any input from participants that had wished to attend. Rehearsals would be open. I noted only Michael chose to come along. That is of course, besides Gary, Michelle, Donna and Darren, the four protagonists of the piece. Michael provided Phil with much needed reassurance in regards to - for example - the effectiveness, or aesthetic quality, or authenticity of a scene. Although he would always wait to be asked for his opinion and when it wasn't called for, sat quietly but intently watching. Sitting in rehearsals, I often pondered over reasons why the other participants hadn't turned up: perhaps they had no longer felt welcome; maybe they had lost interest, or had felt their presence at this stage was no longer necessary? I decided that my last conjecture seemed the most likely. Phil had already articulated to me that although, in the rehearsal phase, participants would continue to be welcomed, the story of Harry and Susie was largely complete. The rehearsal process was simply a means through which the actors/actresses could get to grips with the material of the play.

Research Diary 01.12.00
In terms of the participatory process, I am primarily interested in the process by which participants were able to access theatre. I am thus not largely concerned with the rehearsal phase. As the narrative makes clear, rehearsals enabled the director to discuss with the actors/actresses what he wished to communicate artistically. They allowed for the 'drawing out' of underlying themes of the play and the motivations of different characters. In rehearsal, it is the director (who in this case is also Phil) who enforces all of the aforementioned elements, through improvisation, hot seating and role-play, etc.

6.4 Performing *Harry and Susie Get Married?*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>'An Introduction to Performance'</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am standing in the square barren lobby of the 'Lewis Suite', a site in which a conference for professionals affected by drug addiction/alcoholism has just taken place. The performance of <em>Harry and Susie</em> was the conference's main attraction. I now reflect on how it and those that have preceded it have gone.</td>
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In fact, today's performance began, as all had begun - with an introduction from Phil. Taking centre stage, he addresses an audience of faces to which he relays the content of *Harry and Susie*. There is a deliberate pause. He continues: "All of the actors/actresses taking part in this play have been touched, both implicitly and explicitly, by addiction". There is something tender about those introductory words. Spoken with an almost dramatic eagerness to achieve a desired effect - that of breaking the traditional divide that sets actor/actress and audience apart. At this point, my attention is often diverted from Phil to the audience, the faces of which very rarely reveal a disinterestedness in what has been said. Instead, Phil's words appear to resonate throughout the room. Stiffened faces slowly warm, leaving only remnants of hostility. Moments before, a great proportion of them could have been forgiven for thinking that Outside Edge was a 'fly by night' theatre company, seizing on the opportunity to tell a story they knew nothing about. The revelation had instead unveiled a commonality of experience, one that many in the audience would share. I return my gaze to Phil and register the last remarks he makes before the start of every performance: "Remember to watch carefully and store up anything you don't agree with in the play, because in the second part of the exercise you
will be given the chance to have your say. And maybe do a little performing of your own”!
Research Diary 01.12.00

In the various performing contexts of Harry and Susie, Phil’s role as the ‘joker’ remained the same: to explain the rules of forum to audiences and to act as intermediary between audiences and performers in the ‘turn-around’ performance. Audiences were generally small and cohesive. Thus ‘spectactors’ tended to be people affected by chemical dependency. This was certainly the case in rehab centres, though in community spaces and more formal settings like the Lewis Suite audiences were less homogeneous and tended to be more mixed. As the diary extract suggests, Phil’s introductory words, and particularly his revealing that the actors/actresses in the company had all been affected by addiction, seemed to carry a resonant charge with participants which was particularly discernible in the rehab centres.

In fact, Phil uses the introduction to say something about the company and the intended audience - i.e., that they share a commonality of experience - which was crucial in determining how Harry and Susie would be seen and evaluated. That is to say, the fact that Outside Edge had an emotional affinity with many participants promoted participation in an environment which could be deemed safe and welcoming for spect-actors. While, as in the workshop phase, this might also exclude potential participants from joining in - for example, non addicts/alcoholics - this was not the case from my observations in sessions.

‘The Performance’
As the actors/actresses are called into the performance space - which in all cases, seemed somewhat smaller than the one etched out in The Munster studio - there is a low hush. The set, consisting of four small chairs equally distributed at opposite ends of the performance space, is notably minimal. There is quiet, then Susie begins:
Susie: I'm Susie and I'm an addict and alcoholic. I can say it fairly easily now. I've had four months with no mood or mind altering chemicals inside my system.

We are speechless, all eyes transfixed on what occurs on the stage. That's how it is at the beginning. Then, as the performance progresses, there is the occasional whisper, normally corresponding with an unexpected development in the play. Looking around the conference hall today, I was surrounded by professionals: large numbers of qualified men and a less visible presence of professional women. In this way, they had differed from the spectators that had gathered at community venues, or those that had been bundled into the tiny space offered at rehab centres. On one occasion that Outside Edge played to a community centre, my by now practised and closely observant eyes noted a trend in the kind of spectator that seemed always present within this type of venue. First and foremost, there is the ex/recovering addict/alcoholic, the audience for whom *Harry and Susie* was primarily written. I noticed these were the people who often bravely spoke at the end of the performance about the parallels that could be drawn between *Harry and Susie* and what they as addicts/alcoholics had encountered. Also present, are the people who study or work in theatre - the student, dramaturge, director, all invariably armed with note book and pen and in whose duty it rests to assess the quality and effectiveness of the play. Yet, there are those too whose presence represents one last effort to learn what it is they can do for a loved one - a daughter, a son, a husband, a wife etc- whose life so far is controlled by alcohol/drug dependency. Of course, the very nature of rehab centres meant that the audience was invariably made up of people affected by alcoholism and/or drug addiction and their carers/therapists.
Research Diary 01.12.00

In considering the correspondence between Outside Edge's production of *Harry and Susie* and Boal's teachings on the 'Theatre of the Oppressed', I would contend that the content and affect of Outside Edge's model of forum is somewhat different from the ideal model proposed by Boal. Forum in Outside Edge's sense tended to be a highly portable theatre, using minimal sets and lighting. Yet, following Boal (1992:235): "...Ideally the set should be as fully developed as possible, with as minute detail as is necessary". Whilst Outside Edge clearly depart from Boal in this respect, this has more to do with the fact that the company works from a limited pool of resources than with matters of
aesthetic choice. The content of Harry and Susie, however, can be aligned very closely with Boal's assertion that forum theatre should 'stimulate debate'. The production, therefore, urges spectators to think carefully about 'substance abuse' and about the pressures that push addicts/alcoholics back into the cycle of addiction. Audiences are further urged to consider the risks of getting drawn into a downwards spiral of unemployment, which leads to boredom, of hanging around with the wrong kind of people and not attending Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) or Narcotics Anonymous (NA) meetings; leading to low self esteem and will power and eventual relapse.

It follows that Harry and Susie is not a story that offered audiences a neat picture for which they could enter into at will and without responsibility. This can be evidenced in a part of the play where Susie recounts the cruel details of an ex-boyfriends death:

Susie: I was looking forward to seeing this ...boyfriend...and, I went in the flat and it was freezing cold. There was no electricity, no heating, he hadn't been paying the bills. I was looking round, I had this lighter and I flicked it on and went into the kitchen. See, I was in the kitchen and with the light from this lighter you could see the filth; boxes, rubbish, that sort of thing. And he was lying there on the floor. He was frozen, like a wax works. There was a syringe hanging out of him. And you know what, I looked for the rest of his gear. I wanted to look at his face but I couldn't. And there were tears in my eyes and yet I still looked for his gear. I found it. I had a hit...

Phil had expressed to me in rehearsals that this particular part of the play was intended to provoke participants and stimulate learning. In experiencing various performances of Harry and Susie I was able to observe the potency and effects of such scenes, and thus appreciate how they impacted the consciences of those who watched. For example, on one occasion that I watched the play I became aware of a young girl sitting beside me. The girl's gaze had been fixed on the trembling, weeping ghost of Susie's mother who had just been violently assaulted by Susie's father. Her eyes had remained fixed as she repeatedly shook her head in disbelief. Such reactions - which I
realised had been based on the reality of Benny and Gary’s lives (see pp.239-240) - helped me appreciate the impact of Harry and Susie on observers and as such, how showing participants the reality of chemical dependency took them well beyond passive reception of the play. At the same time, however, they revealed the very great potential for those observing the play to be negatively effected. Phil, who is very aware of this fact, articulated the sense of responsibility Outside Edge has to audiences in terms of a previous project the company has worked on:

“We did a gig in Springfield hospital in the drug and alcohol unit. And we went in there with Family Life, and the kind of impact we had in there was like really powerful with people cause like, we were telling their story. What they were actually going through, their life. And almost to be able to do that, to that kind of level, which is really - in once sense it’s really dangerous... Because we had a real problem with the last one, ‘are we just messing with people’s heads’? Because, you know, it really affected people, but it affected people in a really positive way, which was really surprising. And so we had this, ‘were we just playing with people’s heads’? And I think we came to the conclusion, no we weren’t. But it needed a real degree of commitment, of professionalism, to work on the kind of stuff we were working with”.

When working with authentic but painful material then, there is a strong possibility that audiences will be impacted in negative ways. While, as Phill suggests, ‘a real degree of commitment and professionalism’ has reduced the likelihood of this occurring, there are further ways the company ensures that audiences are not adversely effected. In the context of Harry and Susie, one of the ways Outside Edge has done this is by making sure the play was also entertaining. There were moments when Harry and Susie was very amusing. For example, when Eric - who runs the self help group - utilises alienation effects Brecht himself would be proud of. One being when he turns directly to the audience and asks:

9 A play which examined the affects of chemical dependency on the family.

10 Interview - Phil Fox, 2000.
Eric: Right, anyone in ‘ere got six months clean time...? Anyone got four months...? Two months...?

In bringing light relief to *Harry and Susie* Outside Edge has not only lessened the potential for spectators to be negatively effected by the production, but has also drawn directly from Boal’s instructions that theatre should be both critically challenging and entertaining. Another way in which the company has attempted to make the experience of *Harry and Susie* less ‘painful’ for audiences is by giving the play an ambiguous ending - one which was neither positive or negative. A dichotomy, however, is presented here: Boal asserts that for forum to work effectively the plays have to have a negative ending; yet to end *Harry and Susie* negatively would be to leave participants adversely effected. For Outside Edge then, the experiment in *Harry and Susie* was to try to achieve a unity between these contradictions. So, although *Harry and Susie* culminates in Susie’s relapse, the very last thing we see on stage is her making a phone call to her counsellor to get help. Here, we actually find an aspect of *Harry and Susie* pronouncing on Boal’s proposal for forum theatre.

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**‘The Interval’**

After a performance, and usually after a ten-minute break, Phil would emerge again to take centre stage. He begins by firstly asking whether the audience has any thoughts about the play. When they have exhausted the issues they deem to be important in *Harry and Susie*, Phil proceeds to explain that the play will be shown again. If at any point of the performance an audience member feels that Susie, the main protagonist of the piece, could have done things differently, they are to shout ‘stop!’ at which point they will be encouraged to assume Susie’s role and bring the play to a different, and most importantly, positive end:

“As you’ll be acting, let us first do some quick warm up exercises”, Phil would say in a clear musical, carrying voice.

Research Diary 01.12.00

The interval marks the end of conventional playing to interaction with the audience. In this way, participants assume more functional roles, discussing
issues of relevance within the play. They function, then, in a similar way to participants in the workshop and feedback phases. However, whereas in these contexts the 'theatre' element has been considerably sparse, the ensuing 'turn-around' performance encourages participants to critically challenge their oppression by performing resistance to their realities. As such, it powerfully constructs creative meaning whilst developing critical and therapeutic understanding. The purpose of the warm up activities is to smoothly guide participants into the role of actor/actress and thus, once again erase the boundary between the world on the stage and the world of spectators. The proceeding 'turn-around' performance is then structured to stimulate debate between the spectators and actors/actresses and between the spectators themselves.

'The turn-around performance'

During one turn-around performance, Andrea, a woman in her late twenties/early thirties, offered to demonstrate how she would have done things differently to Susie. It was the part of Harry and Susie where Susie, having been invited back to Harry's flat is confronted by the smell of marijuana. Despite feeling uneasy, Susie stays at the flat and begins a relationship with Harry. Andrea had nervously made her way through rounds of applause to the performance space, which was at the same time being vacated by the actress playing Susie. Alone but for the exception of Gary/Harry, Andrea tells us what she feels Susie has done wrong: 'She shouldn’t have gone back to the flat’, she says, ‘She was in a vulnerable place, it wasn’t safe’. From Andrea’s point of view, an addict/alcoholic will always be an addict/alcoholic: he/she never ‘totally’ recovers. Thus, ‘keeping safe’, staying away from old friends that are negative influences, going to NA meetings and finding work, means ‘keeping clean’. Phil has been observing events intently. He says, "Ok Andrea, so you’ve told us what you think Susie should do, why not show us”? Andrea agrees to take on the role of Susie and the scene is run again.

As Susie, Andrea assertively begins the scene by declining Harry’s offer to return to his flat. She explains to Harry: “I’m not ready, I can’t be getting involved with anything or anyone right now - I need to get my own head straight”. Andrea is visibly emotional and slightly shaking, but she is also clearly pleased with what she has said. Yet Gary/Harry, who is on a mission to bring the piece to its original end, must show Andrea how
difficult it is to change reality. Thus he urges her to come back to his flat. He is charismatic and plays on the attraction Andrea would have observed between Harry and Susie in the conventional play. In other forums I had observed participants giving in at such points, returning to their seats to give other members the chance to enact possible solutions. Andrea, however, seemed resolute. She was determined to break the cycle of addiction Gary/'Harry' personified. I deduced from this that Andrea was not merely acting out 'past experiences' but was also training for her future. There is a long pause before Andrea starts speaking, but as soon as she does I realise that she will not be returning to her seat defeated. She has a look of defiance about her and she is almost smiling as she says to Gary/'Harry', "If I go back with you, I go back on the stuff and I can't - no, I won't let that happen, sorry". Gary/'Harry' shrugs his shoulders and says, "Ok, I know what it's like when you're in that vulnerable place. See you at the next meeting". Andrea has clearly won this battle. Yet as she returns to her seat, I am less struck by the sound of applause and whistles she receives than by the almost ecstatic sense of pride the participant displays.

Research Diary 01.12.00

In the course of the various performances of Harry and Susie I observed different audience members enacting possible solutions. They thus engaged in performances in ways that took them beyond the gaze of passive observers and became wholly immersed in the events they participated in. To discover solutions to problems encountered by Susie, they frequently turned to answers they as addicts/alcoholics would give, and looked for explanations that were inherent in their own awareness. The level of interaction was largely dependent on the kind of venue, with those in rehab centres readily able to apply Harry and Susie to their own lives and draw on their own experiences. As participants emerge from their seats they are shy, tense, nervous. But as they return, fully engulfed in a round of applause, they are empowered. Having tested many ideas, they are allowed to discover the possibility for positive answers themselves.
Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide a critique of the participatory process utilised in the creation of Outside Edge’s production of Harry and Susie. The purpose of this critique has been to analyse the ‘transformative’ power of participatory theatre, where participation is seen to encourage both self-representation and re-identification. In Part one I showed how the four-day workshop encouraged self-representation by privileging the voices of participants in the construction of Harry and Susie. Initially, I described how a sense of ‘belonging’ and ‘togetherness’ was produced through the three main areas of the workshop: the process of play, textual and symbolic mapping and improvisation. While allowing for the forging of effective bonds between participants, the workshop also enhanced personal and group development. In describing the strong emotional content of the workshop, I have argued, at various points, that its aesthetic potential was weakened. The largely therapeutic strategies fostered by the facilitator, further revealed the tension between process and artistic sensibility, and whether they can function equally in community theatre.

In Part two, the contradictions of theatre in the community were further illuminated through the discussion of the one-day feed-back session. Such a discussion revealed the limitations of participation and specifically, whose voices actually get heard. A related question concerned the authenticity of Harry and Susie. While the participants served to authenticate Harry and Susie - by revealing true emotions and experiences in the workshop, and then in validating the play text in the feed back session - the play was not a truthful depiction of any one story, but a generalised narrative about addiction. Part three shifted focus from the sense of ‘welcoming’ community explored in the workshop phase, to the notion of ‘empowering’ community. I argued here, that ‘empowering community’ was engendered through active participation in
forum performance of Harry and Susie. Harry and Susie then, became a powerful instrument of liberation and self-valuing, a site in which participants re-identified themselves.
Chapter Seven

Community Theatre: Demystifying the Role of Asians in Making Theatre? The Case of Tamasha Theatre Company

7.1 Introduction

We have seen, in the previous two chapters, how notions of community and of collective experience become more salient with 'active' participation in - the making and staging of - theatrical performance. As both the Bubble and Outside Edge's - very different - approaches to community theatre have shown, active participation can be understood as two kinds of interactive experiences. On the one hand, interaction can mean the 'creative' input of participants; on the other hand, it can mean the 'critical' activation of audiences' consciences. Crucially, both types of participatory experience take participant-audiences beyond the level of passive spectators and redefine them "as embodied performing coactors" (Chaudhuri, 1995:24).

In their utilisations of promenade and site specific performance, for example, the Bubble has encouraged spectators to traverse conventional barriers - divisions between actor/actress and audience, distinctions between professional and amateur performer, etc - in an effort to bring performers and spectators together and thus engender a sense of 'shared experience'. For Outside Edge, the use of extensive workshop programmes that culminate in improvisational, participatory performances (forum theatre) has also worked to reinforce a sense of 'collectivism' and 'cohesion' amongst participants. This has been particularly true of the 'workshop phase', which - whilst enabling participants to construct themselves as 'vital subjects' in the creation of an aesthetic form - allowed for the forging of communal bonds, which were further strengthened by a sharing of social experience and an underlining unity of purpose. Such notions of communality have been reinforced through Outside Edge's spatial and performative repositioning of audiences in forum
performances. By casting audiences in the role of 'spect-actors', such performance has generated a sense of 'empowering community' in which (community) members have been inspired to change their own realities and way of life.

Participation and the meaning of participation is thus central to both the Bubble and Outside Edge's practical engagements with community theatre. In this final empirical chapter, I examine more subtle understandings of community and participation through an analysis of the community theatre proposed by Tamasha Theatre Company (Tamasha). Tamasha's vision of community theatre centres on a specific 'community of interest' group - 'the Asian community'. In this sense, the company's practice exemplifies the sense of specificity that Outside Edge's approach to theatre in the community implies. Yet, in being recognised as a 'culturally specific' theatre company, Tamasha's conceptualisations of community also embody the idea of cultural identity. As 'theatre' emerging out of 'the Asian community', and being understood as 'community' in the sense that there is a sharing of cultural preference, notions of culture and identity become central to Tamasha's engagement with community theatre.

It is important to note that the term 'Asian community' is a complex and contested category, which often provokes dubious arguments about 'pure', 'organic' and 'homogenised' identities. Whilst recognising that 'communities' are also heterogeneous and fragmented, I use the term 'Asian' community in referring to people of 'South Asian' - as opposed to 'East Asian' - origins, and in acknowledging that the wide disparities between these people are often negated by discursive, material and political suggestions of 'collective identity' (Dwyer, 1999:13). It follows that the experience that Tamasha offers us is of particular import, both for understanding the processes of community formation and for probing questions of cultural identity. Furthermore, and as I
shall go on to discuss, in extending our analysis beyond issues of theatre and performance to an exploration of the role of theatre in constructing ideas about identity, Tamasha’s practice also raises specific issues and tensions.

Tamasha aims to encourage non-traditional theatregoers (in this case Asians) into conventional theatre buildings. In this way, the company follows the Bubble and Outside Edge in their mission to create access to, and to involve those traditionally ‘unseen’ in, theatre spaces. However, whereas the aforementioned companies stage their productions as performance ‘beyond’ theatre - in parks, hospitals, (in the case of the Bubble) and in community and rehabilitation centres (in the case of Outside Edge) - for Tamasha, staging performance ‘in’ theatre forms part of the company’s endeavour to integrate into the British mainstream. One reason for this is Tamasha’s concern to distance itself from the idea of community theatre, and more specifically, from some of the naïve and damaging criticisms that are often made of it. As stated throughout this thesis (see particularly chapter four), theatre in the community occupies a largely marginal position within the British artistic hierarchy. As an art form, it is considered (by its critics) to be obscure, second-rate and lacking in high professional standards. It follows that because there are generic associations between ‘culturally specific’ and ‘community theatre’ companies, companies like Tamasha are often tarnished with the same brush. Tamasha’s bid to become a part of the British mainstream can thus be seen as an attempt to side step the criticism commonly associated with ‘community’ orientated work.

Two further interrelated motivations can be seen in Tamasha’s desire to negotiate a critical distance from the routine (over) identification of Asians with business;¹ and in the company’s rejection to the ‘ghettoisation’ or

¹ The wealth of jokes about ‘Mr Patel’ and his countless corner-shops, is testament to such conceptions.
'confinement' of Asian culture to 'specialised' or 'alternative' spaces. The move in mainstream directions in the first instance, is an attempt to elevate the presence of an Asian expressive culture and thus to demystify the role of Asians in making theatre (see section 7.2). In the second instance, Tamasha seeks to move beyond the ghetto of an Asian subculture, in a bid to make the company's work accessible to other cultures. Brian Roberts (1998) suggests that 'fluctuations in gay visibility' mean that moves into the cultural mainstream are acts of 'assimilation'. He argues that minority groups like Tamasha become 'unidentifiable' as they are 'absorbed' and 'diluted' in the mainstream culture and thus, gradually, 'disappear'. It is a problem that becomes manifest in the dilemma faced by culturally specific theatre companies, torn between meeting the needs of their specific culture and their own desire for visibility beyond it.

Through 'intercultural' strategies, however - which in Tamasha's case, refers to the company's development of 'intercultural drama education' and the staging of intercultural performance - Tamasha is able to reach Asian and non-Asian audiences. 'Interculturalism', and more specifically, 'intercultural theatre' has been theorised by Schechner (1985), Bharucha (1990) and Pavis (1996), as the creation of 'hybrid' forms through the interlocking of performance traditions from 'distinct cultural areas'. For Tamasha, 'intercultural' theatre is an 'encounter of cultures' (Reyes, 1997: 62), a fusion of Western and Asian theatre forms and a site of 'cross-cultural' exchange. Like the broad-based arts companies outlined in 4.2.5 of chapter four, then - i.e., All Change, Hoxton Hall and Theatre Venture - Tamasha is concerned with aesthetics which can transcend social and cultural barriers. However, as I shall go on to show, the means by which Tamasha seeks to open dialogue between different cultures, are markedly different to the 'intercultural' strategies adopted by All Change, Hoxton Hall or Theatre Venture.
In the discussions which follow, I address the connection between community and identity through a consideration of the debates surrounding theatre that emerges 'out' of the community. The starting point will be to briefly outline the history of Tamasha. I will show how the desire to engender an awareness of Asian expressive cultures became the main impetus behind the company's formation, and discuss how Tamasha's sudden and rapid success allowed the company to pursue integrationist objectives. In discussing how Tamasha seeks to bring its work into the cultural mainstream, I ask - as Gilroy (1993:102) does in noting the difficulties faced by the Black arts movement in Britain - in what sense can culturally specific theatre companies like Tamasha be loyal only to themselves? Can the obligations of Asian consciousness and artistic freedom be complimentary rather than mutually exclusive?

In asking these questions, I go on to examine Tamasha's relationship with 'the Asian community'. While acknowledging the genuine appreciation and loyalty the company displays toward its respective community, I argue here that Tamasha largely employs the 'strategic' use of the term 'community'. That is to say, the company utilises notions of 'cohesion', 'togetherness' and 'unity' in the marketing of shows and in terms of funding applications. At the crudest level, this could be deemed as self-serving because it enables Tamasha to maintain regular audiences. In the following section, therefore, I focus on actual work carried out in the wider community. In this way, I examine Tamasha's commitment to work in schools, and as such, the company's development of an 'intercultural theatre education' programme. In discussing how the notion of interculturalism is used in drama education, I draw upon critiques of 'intercultural performance' more generally. I argue that by bringing the company's particular, innovative brand of 'intercultural' theatre into schools, and thus taking it out of the 'special' arenas in which it is normally staged (Kershaw, 1999: 203), Tamasha makes the genre more inclusive.
The main portion of this chapter is devoted to a discussion of Tamasha's 2001 middle-scale staging of Fourteen Songs, Two Weddings and A Funeral. It is based upon my documentation of the development of Fourteen Songs in the rehearsal and performance phases. I shall thus be drawing on material garnered through my involvement as a 'complete observer', and through in-depth interviews conducted with the Director, Marketing Director and Administrator, as well as conversational interviews with the actors/actresses and audiences of Fourteen Songs. It is on the basis of this material that I argue that Tamasha, in attempting to move beyond the ghetto of an Asian subculture to become an integral part of British established theatre, endeavours to 'mainstream' Fourteen Songs. In this way, I outline the specific production choices Tamasha makes in order to reach more diverse audiences. At the same time, however, I will show how such decisions raise particular tensions between Tamasha and its respective community. Many of the themes examined in chapters four, five and six, then - for example, the relationship between theatre and performance; 'community' as a site of harmony and contestation; and the ideological opposition between 'community' and 'established' theatre, etc - are revisited in this final empirical chapter. In this instance, however, they will be analysed through an examination of the issues surrounding 'culture' and 'identity'.

7.2 ‘Demystifying the Role of Asians in Making Theatre’: A History of Tamasha

In an interview conducted in the summer of 1994, researcher Rupa Huq listens to Asian Dub Foundation's (ADF) Annirudha Das as he describes - amongst other things - the group's mission as 'demystifying the role of Asians in making music'. Annirudha relates this calling in part to the dissemination of stereotypical images by the white media, which he asserts, are bound by expectations of what Asians should and should not do:
“First we’re not expected to make music at all then people expect to hear sitars and tablas” (Annirudha Das, quoted in Huq, 1996: 68).

The defiantly appropriated sound of ADF, their fusion of “dub, funky guitars, ... South Asian instrumentations, ... hip-hop beats [and accompanying lyrical messages]” (Sharma, 1996: 47), has a clear political agenda: representing the politics of culture to Asian (and ‘White’) Britain. The ways in which, for example, being Asian is ineluctably associated with passivity and obedience. By breaking with the ‘type of sound’ Asians are expected to have, ADF - whilst still clearly utilising traditional forms of Indian music - cogently affirm an Asian identity as ‘strong’, ‘warrior-like’, ‘rebellious’. In so doing they directly challenge predominant notions of Asian passivity and cultural invisibility within the music industry and British society more generally.

ADF’s antagonism towards popular mystifications of ‘Asianness’ - their refusal to be held hostage to such, attest to a new phase of Asian consciousness, the so called ‘Asian kool’ (See Gillespie, 1995; Sharma et al, 1996). According to Sharma et al (1996), ‘Asian kool’ refers to the conscious attempt to destroy old stereotypes of Asians as dull, unexciting and characteristically ‘uncool’. Within this category are rap groups like Hustlers HC, Fun^Da^Mental and ADF; high profile comedy sketch shows such as Goodness Gracious Me and more recently, The Kumars at No. 42; and artists like Apache Indian. In addition to being what amounts to an array of expressive activities, such exploits further disrupt notions of a culture uninterested in the arts and exclusively concerned with the world of business. By disrupt, however, I do not mean that negative stereotypes have been transcended, for it is not possible that such images will vanish over night. Thus, jaundiced assumptions about what it means to be Asian continue to shroud from view the broad range of projects emerging out of the community.
Tamasha Theatre Company and Tara Arts (see section 4.2.3.2) are two examples of such work. Like ADF, Tamasha and Tara are concerned to negotiate a critical distance from the routine (over) identification of Asians with business. They depart from ADF, however - and indeed from each other - in the ways that they achieve this. For ADF, the lyrically aggressive foregrounding of familiar, often unpleasant social realities (e.g., struggles against racism), serve not only to contest the perceived onlooker status of Asians in the music industry, but also challenge notions of them not being able to make (good/credible) music at all. For Tamasha, demystifying the role of Asians in making theatre becomes an ‘intercultural’ project; one in which a complex dialogue between Indian and Western cultural traditions allows for the company’s integration into the British cultural mainstream. For Tara, elevating the presence of an Asian expressive culture, is inextricably linked to the company’s own desire for ‘self-representation’. Crucially, however, in Tara’s sense, this is not dependant on integration into the ‘dominant culture’, but is instead expressed in the company’s ‘own terms’.

It follows that whilst ADF, Tamasha and Tara are all concerned to raise the profile of British Asian artistic practice, they make this case in fundamentally different ways. Throughout this chapter, I shall be referring to Tara as an Asian theatre company whose approach to theatre in the community can be seen in contrast to Tamasha’s approach. In the remainder of this section, however, I will focus explicitly on Tamasha’s history.

Established in 1989 by Kristine Landon-Smith and Sudha Bhuchar - who remain joint artistic directors - the context and catalyst for Tamasha’s realisation was a production based on Mulk Raj Anand’s novel, Untouchable. Set in 1930s India, ‘Untouchable’ reflects the experiences of the low castes, those most deprived and devalued. Staged at the Riverside Studios in Hammersmith in 1989, the show played in Hindi and in English on alternate
nights. Its success signalled a demand for theatre work drawn from the Asian community. Proceeding in this direction could thus be seen as a practical move. Initial productions such as House of The Sun (1991), Women of The Dust (1993), and A Shaft of Sunlight (1994), centred on the experiences of Asians in India and also utilised Western theatre forms. In this, they became the means by which Kristine and Sudha were able to ‘present India to England’, and thus also reveal to their growing ('white') audiences the merits of Asian artistic work.

By 1996, Tamasha had gained significant reputation with the company's production of East Is East - at Birmingham Repertory Theatre and then at the Royal Court - to attract more diverse audiences. Written by Ayub Khan Din, a writer commissioned through Tamasha's 'Writer’s Workshops Scheme', the play has since been made into the highly popular film of the same name. Subsequent productions such as Balti Kings in 1999 and Fourteen Songs, Two Weddings and A Funeral, first in 1998 and then 2001 - whilst strengthening Tamasha's status as one of Britain's leading Asian theatre companies - provide one of the main motors for the company's driving ambitions. In revealing a demand for works of Asian significance, a demand made by both Asian and non-Asian audiences, they further highlight the prospect of moving from 'alternative' to mainstream stages.

Tamasha’s work, as practised to date, seeks a fusion of Western and Indian techniques. This is in keeping with the company’s formal objectives, which - Kristine relayed to me in interview from Tamasha’s North London base - balance between assimilationist and integrationist aspirations:

"...I mean formally our objectives - and I think this is right - is to produce work of Asian influence on a British stage. And to achieve a culturally diverse audience and you know, I think we’re doing that very successfully. On our own as a company we are achieving a very diverse audience... I think also that part of our aim is to be regarded
as part of the British theatre scene. Some people might say, you know, why is that important? Why does it matter? But I think it does matter, because I think that your work is judged artistically, and not culturally. For me, we are led artistically. I would say, we are led by our art before our culture, and I think it's important to have a place where you're not ghettoised”.^2

Kristine's comments reflect an acute awareness of the tensions within ideas of 'integration'/ 'assimilation' and those of non-conformity and 'separatism'. As the director suggests, 'integration' does not carry the same level of importance for all companies, but for Tamasha being regarded as 'part of the British theatre scene' becomes a means of challenging, escaping even, the company's 'ghettoisation'. For Kristine, the primary duty for Tamasha, as a 'culturally specific' theatre company is to produce work of 'Asian' influence on a 'British' stage. It is through such work - and thus, their 'art' - that Tamasha constructs the company's identity. In being led by their 'art' - and therefore by artistic and aesthetic standards - Tamasha will not be constrained by its culture, which can confine the company to the ghetto of an Asian subculture.

In a similar vein, Goodness Gracious Me's Nina Wadia reflects:

"When Goodness Gracious Me began, I realised that we'd become role models, which felt like a huge responsibility... but I think we've set the standard and made Asian performers feel like they don't have to be confined to speciality channels - they can break into mainstream".^3

The general correspondence between Wadia's views and Tamasha's outlined objectives should be self-evident. Both reject the confinement of Asian culture to 'specialised' or 'alternative' spaces, and both see inclusion into the British mainstream as desirable as well as necessary. A central issue arising from such objectives, then, concerns the level of involvement Tamasha has with the Asian community. The next section offers some reflection on this subject


through a consideration of Tamasha's engagement with notions of 'community' and 'cultural identity'.

7.3 Tamasha, Community and Cultural identity

By definition, Tamasha is a culturally specific theatre company and in this, is seen to identify with 'the Asian community'. The 'Asian' community - which in Tamasha's frame of reference pertains to Asians with origins in Britain and the Indian subcontinent, and thus who are largely of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage - is therefore central to Tamasha and to the company's approach to theatre in the community. There are tensions, however, within the ways that Tamasha chooses to talk about, and locate the Asian community - and the concept of 'community' more generally - within its project of (community) theatre.

On the one level, Tamasha utilises a notion of 'community', which reinforces the company's identification with, and sense of belonging to, the Asian community. This can be seen in the company's commitment to 'nurturing' and producing the work of (British) Asian writers, which it does through the 'Writers Workshops Scheme'. As was noted in the previous section, this scheme enabled writers like Ayub Khan Din to write the extremely popular East Is East. Such activities - by focussing explicitly on British Asians and the development of their creative writing skills - sustain and reinforce the shared sense of identification Tamasha has with the Asian community. They also work, however, to raise Tamasha's profile because the company is associated with plays like East Is East as a 'leading' British/Asian theatre company. While this, as a direct result of the company's 'community' orientated activities, is fortuitous, it also highlights the other, more 'strategic' level at which Tamasha utilises notions of community.
By 'strategic', I am referring to the thinking behind Tamasha’s deployment of ‘community’ in the marketing of its shows and in the company’s funding applications. In both instances, Tamasha reveals a firm commitment to ideas of community and cultural identity to satisfy the commercial needs of the company. This perhaps sounds like too cynical a critique of Tamasha’s utilisations of community, but it is evidently based on the words of the company’s Administrator, Kathy Bourne:

“...[I]n terms of the way that Tamasha markets its shows, we very much use the idea of community, very, very much, as a way of bringing groups together to come and see our shows. We like our Asian audiences to feel that they’re a part of something, they are part of what we do, and we put on productions for them. All absolutely inclusive, this is work that we’re doing that we believe that you are going to have an empathy with, that you are going to want to see, because it has a particular appeal and resonance for you”.4

This quotation is illustrative of the way Tamasha mobilises ideas of cohesion, unity and belonging in the marketing of its shows. Kathy directs attention to the ‘inclusive’ nature of Tamasha’s productions, which she describes as totally accessible to ‘Asian’ audiences in their content and meaning. The administrator also places emphasis on the connections between Tamasha and the Asian community through aspects of their culture, aspects which further allow ‘Asian’ audiences to have ‘empathy’ and ‘resonance’ with Tamasha’s work. Moreover, such ‘correspondence’ allows Tamasha to bring Asian communities into the theatre. Similar uses of ‘community’ and ‘cultural identity’ have also been employed in Tamasha’s attempts to obtain funding, as Kathy similarly reflects:

“...[A]nd you should read our funding applications, you know, community is smack, all over every single one. Because I think the funding bodies love to see it - it is important to us as well - but they

love to see it, they love to see that we are managing to attract a community".\(^5\)

Again, aspects of identification and belonging, which sustain homogenous understandings of community, are seen in the above working to ensure Tamasha's successful obtainment of funding. This, like the previous example, is illustrative of the way that Tamasha uses the language of 'community', strategically, to serve its own needs as a company. Barnaby King (2000a:133) uses similar terms to describe the 'community' orientated activities of some 'black' theatre companies, which he sees as "...self-serving...[and] little more than recruiting exercises designed to build up regular audiences". These sentiments, even if a little harsh, do ring true with Tamasha's strategic deployment of community, which, in terms of both its marketing and funding applications, enables the company to consistently attract Asian audiences. Beyond what could be considered as superficial and 'external' constructions of community, however, Tamasha seems unable to have real and close relationships with the Asian community.

This is in contrast to other Asian theatre companies, like Tara, whose 'culturally specific' approach to community theatre demands that the company has tangible involvement with its communities. Crucially, for Jatinder Verma, this involves working against a singular idea of community - which he articulated as the desire to capture 'particular' audiences - and instead embracing a truer and more expansive notion of collectivities. In this way, the artistic director emphasised Tara's 'links' and 'relationships' with the East African Asian community, connections which were reinforced through the sharing of history and culture, and through 'a sense of being part of a larger tribe'. He also stressed the importance of being 'responsible' to and 'respecting the wishes' of East African Asians. This entailed acknowledging the fact that the 'East African Asian community' would generally not 'think

\(^5\) Interview - Kathy Bourne.
about the arts', and so theatre for them, needed to be capable of 'getting in touch' with, and meeting the community in places they were familiar with. Following Jatinder:

"So the kind of spaces that I'm going into is community centres or schools, which people in that locality will know and use in different ways: they might use those spaces for weddings, for school itself or extra classes".

Tara's vision of community theatre, then, in bringing theatre to the places in which East African Asians move and interact, centralises the experiences of those usually marginalised from theatrical activity. In attempting to 'meet' the (East African Asian) community 'where they are', and thus integrating theatre into everyday life activities, Tara challenges the constraints of traditional theatres and renders artistic practice inclusive and accessible. Such notions of accessibility are further reinforced through the content of Tara's work, which, according to Jatinder, reflects the 'history', 'experiences' and 'thoughts' of East African Asians.

Comparatively, Tamasha's commitment to community theatre involves trying to bring 'Asian' audiences into established theatre buildings. This is an approach to theatre in the community which, in contrast to Tara and indeed most other community theatre companies, does not attempt to relocate 'theatre' in public spaces. Instead, by staging its productions as 'performance in theatres', Tamasha is able to position the company within the British cultural mainstream. This identification also enables Tamasha to challenge what it sees as more 'negative' identifications - like 'community theatre' - and assert the company's 'artistic' identity. Kathy Bourne reflects this, when in interview she responds to being asked how Tamasha felt about the company's occasional categorisation as theatre in the community:

“Community theatre, in terms of Tamasha, is quite misleading. You know, ...community theatre in many respects implies that we take our theatre out into the community, as opposed to encouraging people to come into the theatre, and that is what we're about. Primarily because the productions that we put on, are too big to take out to the community. I think that, if I was to be honest with you, Tamasha is very keen to become an integral part of British mainstream theatre, because we feel that there is a place for it, rather than exclude ourselves from that, let's see how we can be encompassed within that...I think [community theatre]... divides, it divides theatre in a way that it should never do. It's a very negative - I think it's a very negative term. I mean yeah, it's segregating, it's once again putting companies like Tamasha or Nitro, it's marginalising us.”

Kathy's comments illuminate the way Tamasha establishes a sense of identity by contrasting itself with what the company is not. Tamasha is not 'community theatre', whose accompanying associations of community involvement, amateurism and restricted artistic horizons, relegate it to the category of 'low art'. Instead Tamasha, as Kathy suggests, is 'very keen' to become an integral part of established theatre which as 'high art' is associated with professionalism, artistic excellence and high production standards. Certain implications arise from this, particularly in relation to the level of real involvement Tamasha has with 'the Asian community'. As I have tried to show in this section, Tamasha's understandings of 'community' - in terms of the Asian community and of community more generally - are marked by ambivalence. Thus, while Tamasha defines itself as 'community' in contexts which ensure and enable the company's continued success - i.e., in terms of funding applications, etc - the company is not prepared to be defined as 'community' in others - for example, doing theatre 'in the community'.

In concluding this section I want to emphasise the largely 'strategic' way in which Tamasha has deployed the notion of community. Consistent with the

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7 As an ethnic theatre company, Nitro focuses on the experiences of the 'Black' community.

8 Interview - Kathy Bourne.
company’s desire to integrate into mainstream theatre, such deployment has not allowed for real or meaningful relationships with ‘the Asian community’. Despite these sentiments, however, the next section - in discussing Tamasha’s commitment to work in schools - focuses on actual work carried out in the community.

7.4 Work in the Community: Interculturalism and Theatre Education

The main thrust of Tamasha’s work in the community has been directed towards schools and education. Initially, Tamasha ran educational projects alongside each of its productions. Such projects took the form of workshops, which, in exploring themes within particular productions, were geared towards shaping the pupils’ relationships with theatre. However, the company found that working in this way did not encourage long term relationships with schools, as Kathy Bourne described: “You’d go in and you’d do a workshop and then you’d go”. Tamasha therefore sought a more direct and meaningful relationship with schools, through the development of the ‘TIME’ (Tamasha Intercultural Millennium Education) programme.

Spearheaded by Tamasha’s Education Consultant, Sita Brahmachari and Kristine Landon-Smith, TIME ‘...is an innovative professional development for secondary drama teachers focussing on the development of intercultural drama education’.

In this way, the project aims to help teachers use the arts as a vehicle for furthering students’ creative and cultural understanding. In July 2001, I attended the ‘TIME 2001 Conference’, which, co-hosted by Tamasha and The Central School of Speech and Drama, showcased some of the major findings of the two-year project. The conference charted the change in thinking in arts and education policy from a multicultural to an

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9 Interview - Kathy Bourne.

intercultural approach, and sought to make apparent the full critical and
creative potential for cultural exchange in British drama education. In seeking
to challenge the myth of multiculturalism - which is described as the
acknowledgement of other cultures, the fact that they exist, but nothing more -
emphasis was placed on the integrative abilities of interculturalism, which
moves beyond mere recognition to embrace and integrate with different
cultures. Intraculturalism - which Tamasha cites as informing their work -
goes a step further, as it refers to the 'fusion' of different cultures, and
recognises that we are of many diaspora - many cultures.

Critiques of multiculturalism, such as Patrice Pavis' The Intercultural
Performance Reader (1996) theorise intercultural theatre as the complex
interweaving of cultures, histories and performance traditions. Pavis draws
upon a wide range of contributions from artists and scholars - such as Richard
Schechner, Peter Brook, Erika Fischer-Lichte, Christopher Balme and Rustom
Bharucha - to provide useful insights into the issues surrounding intercultural
performance. One of the most central issues for the purposes of this section is
whether intercultural performance can be considered as an equal exchange
between cultures. Richard Schechner and Peter Brook, through their work -
in Brook's case, productions like Mahabharata; and in Schechner's
theorisations (see, for example Schechner, 1982 and 1985) more generally -
certainly adopt the viewpoint that it can. For them, intercultural performance
is 'universal': that is, it is capable of transgressing social and cultural
boundaries, and has the potential to unite all cultures.

Rustom Bharucha (1996: 196-212), however, is not persuaded by this
optimistic line of thinking, and he severely criticises the likes of Schechner
and Brook for what he sees as facilitating the development of 'orientalist'
thought and action. In Bharucha's terms, 'intercultural' theatre involves the
search for 'roots' and 'meaning', which, for him can only be found in 'India'.
He maintains that 'theatre' and 'texts' should not be divorced from their cultural context, and thus a primary factor is finding 'appropriate' cultural environments for new productions (Pavis, 1996:196). Bharucha further argues that 'intercultural performance', as practised within the Euro-American framework, comprises a primarily Western perspective which often denies "...the tensions and immediate realities of ['other' histories]", in favour of idealistic notions of egalitarian cross-cultural exchange (Bharucha, quoted in Pavis, 1996:196). Expressing similar sentiments, Kershaw (1999:204) has wondered if 'intercultural performance' can become truly democratised and thus move away from the 'unpleasant' debates - about 'orientalism', 'cultural imperialism' and 'appropriation' - that 'plague' its practice.

In the context of the 'TIME 2001 Conference', the fact that it was led by 'Indian' directors and scholars - i.e., Kristine Landon-Smith, Sudha Bhuchar and Sita Brahmacari - meant that those traditionally theorised as 'others' in academic texts, poems, novels etc, represented 'themselves'. It is important to note, however, that 'self-representation', in Tamasha's terms, is also about the company's integration into mainstream British theatre. Tamasha's engagement with 'intercultural' performance, then, can be seen as a means of engaging with the 'dominant' culture and theatre form. Verma (1998) and King (2000b) have argued that this kind of cross-cultural dialogue is an unequal exchange between cultures, and I shall elaborate on such ideas in the following section. Certainly, however, by bringing its own particular and innovative brand of 'intercultural' theatre into schools - and thus moving intercultural performance away from the 'special arenas', 'high-profile festivals' and 'touring circuits' in which it is normally promoted (Kershaw, 1999:203) - Tamasha can be seen taking steps to 'democratise' the genre. The practical element of the TIME conference - which showed how intercultural drama has been developed in schools - demonstrated this, by
revealing the democratic potential for pupils to express their own identities in creative ways.

In this session, Kristine Landon-Smith, with the help of drama students, demonstrated the working method utilised in intercultural drama classes. In this, the director pointed to the familiar rehearsal aid of 'hot-seating' - see section 7.5.2 for a description of the 'hot-seating' technique - as a possible means for empowering students. Kristine explained that in going into different classrooms she had sensed a general tentativeness amongst drama teachers to actually encourage pupils to use aspects of their own cultures in the process of play making. By emphasising the role of the 'teacher-director'- a role which fuses the 'guiding' and 'instructional' skills of the teacher with the 'creative' influences of the director - Kristine urged teachers to 'hot-seat' pupils in ways which were relevant to their own identities.

It follows that during the workshop, a student - who, the audience was told, was of Jamaican heritage - chose to play a middle-aged Jamaican woman. The student could have also chosen to take on a culture which had no relation to her own, but which she came into contact with on a regular basis. In choosing to take on the role of a Jamaican woman, exchange between the pupil and the 'teacher-director'/'hotseater' would have ideally occurred in patois. However, because Kristine, as the 'teacher-director'/'hotseater', was not able to ask the pupil questions in patois, she spoke to her in ways which allowed the student to become confident in the role she was playing, and by asking questions that would extract the idiosyncrasies of the student's character. Kristine thus became the 'culture bearer'. That is, she transferred her own understanding of the pupils' character back to the pupil. This, according to Kristine relies on the confidence of the 'teacher-

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11 As was illustrated in another 'hot-seating' exercise, in which a 'White' student also chose to play a Jamaican woman.
director’/‘hotseater’, a confidence which crucially, stems from an ‘artistic’ - not a ‘cultural’ - surety.

As a member of the audience, many of the pupils I observed were from ‘other’ cultural backgrounds - for example Somalian, Bosnian, Kenyan and Jamaican. Playing from their own cultural backgrounds, I believe, seemed to give such pupils ‘real’ voices and enabled them to construct themselves as ‘equal’ subjects in the classroom. There was a rich pluralism to the voices, in the sense that no one voice was predominant. In such a context, I think the pupils may have been empowered, as they engaged with aspects of their identities and culture in ways which emphasised their own creative abilities and talents.

It follows that in Tamasha’s transference of the ‘hot-seating’ technique - as a tool used in promoting cross-cultural understanding - to classrooms, the company has purposefully challenged the dominant voice (of ‘Whiteness’) in schools. Such intercultural strategies, however, also have the added benefit of allowing Tamasha to have ongoing relationships with young people and in this way, attract diverse audiences. Another way that Tamasha achieves a broad range of audiences, is through the ‘mainstreaming’ of their theatre productions, a subject I shall focus on in the following section.
‘Moving Out of the ‘Ghetto’ and into the Mainstream’: Re-Staging

Fourteen Songs, Two Weddings and A Funeral

A fine, wired gauze, which features portraits of Prem and Nisha, separates the stage from the auditorium. Positioned so as to favour a focussing of the centre, the image of the ill-fated lovers captures the gaze of a mounting audience. People rush to take their seats. The house lights go down, and two spot-lights come up to reveal the solitary figures of Prem and Nisha who stand poised behind the mesh of wire at opposite sides of the stage. They are waiting for a signal and moments later receive it in the form of the recorded prelude to ‘Is Your Love For Real’? The sound represents a fusion of traditional Indian music with Western influenced pop. The actors mime to a bemused audience who, on hearing declarations of deep felt, ‘heart aching’ love, are exposed at once to the classic ingredients of the Bollywood film genre.

Research Diary 14.02.01

This is the overture preceding the first scene of Kristine Landon-Smith and Sudha Bhuchar’s Fourteen Songs. The show premiered in the modestly sized studio of Hammersmith’s Lyric Theatre in 1998, but its popular appeal ensured promotion to the Lyric’s main house in February 2001. Its narrative can be summarised as an account of two brothers, Rajesh and Prem, who,

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12 The show was re-staged at the Lyric in October 2001.
having lost their parents in a car crash as children, have been brought up by their uncles - Kaka, a prominent industrialist and Arun, a professor with a shrewishly humorous wife, Bhagwanti. The arranged marriage of Rajesh to Pooja, the daughter of a professor, ‘Prof’ and wife, Kamla, ends tragically when Pooja falls to her death, leaving their son motherless. Plans are then laid for Rajesh to marry Pooja’s younger sister, Nisha. But, Prem and Nisha, the young couple at the centre of the story, are in love, a secret they choose to share with only Pooja before her sudden death. They both prepare to sacrifice their happiness for family duty. Then Laloo, the cherished family servant, deliberately drops evidence at the feet of the bereaved Rajesh. He at once calls off the wedding and the play ends with Nisha and Prem marrying for love (see box 7.1).

A reworking of the blockbuster Hindi film Hum Aapke Hain Koun, Fourteen Songs is consistently a celebration of traditional Indian values - i.e., its main themes centre on family honour, honesty and forgiveness. That Landon-Smith and Bhuchar chose to adapt the film, suggests, not only its malleability, but also its renowned appeal amongst Asian viewers of the Bombay movies. For Gillespie (1995), the social and cultural marginalisation of minorities from the mainstream of British society - which provides them with few cultural or leisure activities - has partly contributed to the rapid expansion of the home video market in Hindi films. Thus, by tapping into this audience, Landon-Smith and Buchar are able to market the theatre as a key site in which Hum Aapke Hain Koun can be re-imagined, a space in which friends and family can come together, and a place where issues related to the community will be expressed.
Box 7.1: 'Fourteen Songs Two Weddings and A Funeral: A Plan of The Plot'

The choice of play is of course, crucial in determining the kinds of people that will be attracted to a theatre. According to Suman Bhuchar (to be distinguished from her sister Sudha Bhuchar), Head of Marketing at Tamasha, the endeavour to make Tamasha's work accessible to Asian and non-Asian audiences alike, relies on the ability "...to keep it [the work] product specific...[T]hinking about what type of work would appeal to what type of group". Thus, the first of two productions Tamasha chose to stage at the middle-scale, was Balti Kings. Set in the milieu of a kitchen in a Balti restaurant, this play seemed to "...tap into the mood of the late 1990s: self

confidence among certain sections of the Asian population mingled with a
desire within the wider population for some insight into Asian life in
businessmen who have built their fortunes on the back of Britain’s most
popular food, the curry, the wider appeal of this play should be self-evident.

The imperative to move to a middle-scale production with Fourteen Songs,
however, would quickly demonstrate the need for a more mainstream
interpretation, one that would appeal to a broad theatrical audience whilst
also embracing the company’s integrationist aspirations. It is to the
‘mainstreaming’ of Fourteen Songs that I will attend in this section. In this way, I
will outline the specific production choices - i.e., the language, set, design,
acting style, stage convention, music and casting choices - Tamasha made in
order to realise the company’s integrative objectives. The latter part of the
section will focus on the particular tensions raised by Fourteen Songs for Asian
and non-Asian audiences.

7.5.1 The Mainstreaming of Fourteen Songs: Language, Set and Design

The ‘mainstreaming’ of Fourteen Songs can be seen in many aspects of the
production. In the opening scene of the ‘cricket match’, for example, the
legacy of a colonial past is at once mounted and then reinforced through
Lalloo’s running commentary, a combination of English sporting idioms and
dashes of North Indian folk law and tradition:

Lalloo: Here comes batsman No. 1 - Karan Shankar. He has played very well
this season. He is sure to be ‘man of the match’. I predict he will be
good for a century. And facing him is fast bowler Prem Bhaiya
whose spin is faster than Indra, God of the wind. (p.2, emphasis
added).

And moments later...
Significantly, in choosing to open *Fourteen Songs* with a quintessentially 'English' game, it is not Britain's exploitation of India - an act that ensured the formers' industrial growth and mercantile pre-eminence - that an audience's attention is purposefully directed towards. But rather, the cross cultural exchange - further depicted in Lalloo's use of English and Indian colloquialisms (a feature endemic of the entire text) - between East and West. In this way, the production seeks to establish a correspondence between Asian and non-Asian spectators through the juxtaposition of their cultures on stage.

To similar effect, Sue Mayer's set design, a palatial backdrop of soaring arches, ornate columns and curving staircases, plays an important part in eliciting a particular awareness of India. Set against a blaze of yellow, orange and red lighting, this was - for me - the India of the 'Taj Mahal'. Perhaps, for audience members too, this image conformed to a romantic view of 'home', a perfected vision, which in reality had little or no resemblance to the place they'd left behind. In keeping with the 'professional' world of the play, this image certainly clashed with India's 'landscapes of the mind' (see Said, 1990) - the stereotyped representations of the country as barren and poverty stricken, which were, it seemed, superseded by glamorous conceptualisations of buoyancy and wealth. Such glamorisations - which are also a feature of Bollywood films and advertising - aimed to tap into the taste buds of diverse audiences through reinforcing a more 'civilised' and thus palatable portrait of the Indian subcontinent.
7.5.2 The Mainstreaming of *Fourteen Songs*: Proscenium Staging and Naturalistic Acting

The proscenium staging and 'naturalistic' style of acting are two further elements of theatricality, which can be seen to facilitate the show's assimilation into the mainstream. The proscenium predicates a world of structured, virtual reality, which largely corresponds to a naturalistic, more Westernised style of performance. In Tamasha's utilisation of the proscenium, the company can be seen to positively embrace Western representational conventions - which are principally devoted to psychological storytelling through the medium of words - and in so doing, document the story of star-crossed lovers in a manner accessible to a broad, English speaking audience. Such 'presentation' of the 'other' can be seen in stark contrast to Tara's 'correspondence' with the 'other' (Verma, 1998:132).

Tara - as was noted in sections 7.2 and 7.3 - directly challenges Tamasha's approach to community theatre, and in this allows a different emphasis of the 'culturally specific' approach to theatre to be particularly clear. It follows then, that in Tara's work, it is not Western conventions but traditional Indian theatre forms - most notably 'bhavai' from the Gujarat - that are used as a means of transporting (East African) Asian audiences back to East Africa/India in the search for roots. Implicit to this search is the East African Asian's confrontation of his/her history, in order to come to terms with 'loss' and thus gain 'self-confidence'. Only then, according to Jatinder, can a creative dialogue between the memory of the Asian migrant and modern England, be established.

Barnaby King (2000b: 29), in an essay which examines the relationship between Asian and mainstream arts, has suggested that Tara's 'creative dialogue' with other cultures represents "...interculturalism on one's own
In section 7.4 the argument was made that Tamasha’s engagement with ‘intercultural’ performance could not be seen as an equal exchange between cultures. This is because, in using Western theatre forms to present India to England, Tamasha conforms and thus integrates on the terms of the ‘dominant’ culture. King, then, seems to be saying that in Tara’s renegotiations of histories, cultures and artistic forms, the company has confronted and thus engaged with the ‘dominant’ culture on their own - and thus, on ‘equal’ - terms. This has been particularly evident in Tara’s symbolic disruptions of Western theatre conventions. In fact, according to Jartinder, ‘naturalism’, as the most celebrated characteristics of proscenium staging, is the ‘greatest lie’:

“...I dislike naturalism. I think it’s the greatest lie. And the lie of it is this: You see, theatre thrives on its community. What the proscenium arch system brought to Europe was this notion of a picture box. Where we, the audience, have been privileged to be let into someone’s life. So we’re voyeurs really. And so the actors don’t look at us, they don’t acknowledge we’re there, but they know that we’re watching. So they play up to us. And it seems to me a complete lie, completely making dishonest the process. And then we’re all colluding into the lie. The actor walks in through a door. We know it’s not a real door, but we suspend our disbelief and say, well, actually it’s a real door, even though we know it’s not a real door.

But I think there is another form of acting, and this was acting that was in Europe before the proscenium arch, before the industrial revolution, and that, I think, is closer to the truth of theatre. It doesn’t lie, and that is, fundamentally, because it acknowledges that you exist as an audience. So there’s a direct communication. Direct looking, and often an attempt to bring the audience in. ...For me, that is the kind of theatre I’m interested in”.

14 Interview - Jatinder Verma (emphasis added).
While such criticism has not been directly aimed at Tamasha, the artistic director's aversion to naturalism hints at the wide disparities - in form and in outlook - between Tamasha and Tara. Tamasha would insist, however, that utilisation of the proscenium in Fourteen Songs was, at the functional level, consistent with the play's unaffected performance style. The actors/actresses within its frame, bound by its parameters of space and time, 'lived through' the illusion of India in true Stanislavskian style. Spectators were thus privy to the 'living portraits' of character and heightened acting styles that perpetuated a psychological realism. A clear advocate of Stanislavski's 'system' of acting\textsuperscript{15}, Kristine explained in interview, that she had demanded a 'clarity of truth' from all of the actors/actresses involved. An authenticity, which, when transposed onto the stage, would reveal itself in dialogue, in acting, in set and costumes, in vocal delivery.

For Kristine, this meant that the rehearsal realm became a key site in which a number of the methods espoused by Stanislavski - methods designed to assist actors/actresses with the exploration of character - were utilised. I want now, to outline two of the techniques that seemed to win favour with the Director - the 'Emotion Memory' and 'Hot-Seating'. These techniques, I believe, merit some discussion because they provide the methodological basis by which the actors/actresses in Fourteen Songs were able - through their 'authentic' portrayals of character - to 'captivate' and draw in audiences. This, being one of the mainstays of established theatre, provides further evidence of Tamasha moving away from community theatre - which attempts to break the 'illusion' by getting audiences, as 'critical' observers to stand back from the action - towards the mainstream.

\textsuperscript{15} Konstantin Stanislavski believed that the principal function of theatre is to civilise, increase sensitivity and heighten perception. His 'System' is a series of theoretical writings designed to assist actors/actresses with the inward preparation they would need to undergo in order to explore their roles completely.
The Emotion Memory is a device that involves the actor recreating past events, reliving past emotions so as to attain a new level of reality. According to Stanislavski, the memory of a particular incident could evoke memories of similar incidents, similar feelings; all of which could be harnessed in the creation of a performance. If the actor/actress could define the emotion that was required of him/her at any given moment and then stimulate analogous feelings from his/her own experience, his/her interpretation would be all the more authentic. The gap between actor/actress as individual and actor/actress as performer could be bridged. Actor/Actress and character become one. There were many occasions in which the actors and actresses of Fourteen Songs put the technique of emotion memory into practice. One such occasion involved Mala Ghedia, who played Nisha, having to cry at the death of her sister, Pooja, played by Meneka Das. The point had not been for Mala to remember one of the possibly numerous times in which she had cried. What, instead, had been needed, was for her to remember when someone close to her had died, or to imagine the prospect of this and how it would make her feel. By defining the emotion that was required, Mala could hope to come closer to an authentic performance.

Hot-Seating, as a technique, involves the dissemination of character through a series of probing questions. Kristine often hot seated actors and actresses, when they appeared to be struggling to find ‘truth’ in what they were doing or saying. The characters Prem, Rajesh, Kaka and Laloo - played by Pushpinda Chani, Shammi Aulakh, Shiv Grewal and Rehan Sheikh - for example, all have very definite relationships to one another: Prem and Rajesh are brothers; Kaka, their uncle; and Laloo, the family retainer. The object for Kristine, as the hot-seater, was to make their relationships much clearer, so that audiences would see and believe in them. In adopting a news reporter type style, Kristine posed various questions - which centred round character motivations and their relationship to one another - to each character. In this
way, the director was able to help the actors break down their own characters whilst also maintaining a broader view of the coherence of their roles.

Much was gained, I believe, from the above techniques, which translated into very concrete instruments of naturalistic acting on stage. To reveal how audiences are potentially 'captivated' and drawn in by such acting, I will now focus on - what was for me - a particularly 'powerful' scene in Fourteen Songs. In doing so, I further emphasise the ways in which Tamasha - by directing audiences' attentions to the individual artistry and imaginations of those acting within the proscenium's sphere - departs from companies like the Bubble and Outside Edge in an attempt to 'naturalise' and thus direct Fourteen Songs towards cosmopolitan audiences.

The scene I shall concentrate on - act two, scene five - is to be contrasted with the mostly, light-hearted and comic banter of previous episodes of the play, and sees Mala Ghedia as Nisha and Harvey Virdi as Kamla, playing out the Indian tradition of 'family duty'. Just before this scene, we are witness to the sudden death of Pooja, wife of Rajesh and sister to Nisha. Unbeknown to Nisha, the family make plans for Rajesh to remarry and agree that, since Nisha has developed such strong bonds with Munna (Rajesh and Pooja’s baby), she is an ideal wife for Rajesh. In asking Nisha whether she would agree to entering Kaka’s house ‘as a daughter in law’, Nisha mistakenly takes this to mean as Prem’s wife and agrees. The following extract finds Nisha’s mother, Kamla - aware that Nisha is sacrificing a great deal even in the name of family duty - trying to ascertain whether her daughter is truly happy:

**Box 7.2: ‘Act Two, Scene five of Fourteen Songs’**

*Back at Nisha’s house. It is night – there is quiet. It is the night before the Mehndi celebration.*

*Kamla enters with Munna*
Kamla Nisha! Nisha!

Nisha (entering) Yes, Mummy?

Kamla Come here, darling.

Nisha Is he asleep?

Kamla Yes. So much has happened in his short life and he is so innocent. He has no idea ...

Nisha He never knew Didi to miss her.

Kamla And now that you are entering the house, he’ll never have to miss her.

Nisha Han.

Kamla You are happy, aren’t you, darling?

Nisha Of course I am. Why shouldn’t I be?

Kamla These are not ideal circumstances in which to get married, but your papa and I still want the best for you.

Nisha Mama – I’m very happy.

Kamla You are a good girl. Your Didi is watching and knows that Munna will be well cared for by you.

Nisha I love him as if he were mine.

Kamla You’ll have your own children as well. Brothers and sisters for Munna.

Nisha Ha.

Kamla I’m going to sleep now darling. Tomorrow is a very big day. Your Mehndi is the first of so many celebrations. I’m going to lose another daughter...

She cries. Nisha embraces her.

Nisha Come on, Mummy. You go to bed now.

Kamla You too have an early night.
Nisha Han - good night, Mummy.

She sings to Munna.

Fortune gives but fortune takes,
My happiness aches with grieving,
But we must look, for all our sakes,
At what the strength of love is achieving.

Fortune smiles, but fortune frowns,
This fortune drowns my sorrow.
From funeral white, to wedding gowns
I’ll marry my Prem tomorrow.

Poor little baby so unaware
Of why we cry this way.
And my poor Didi, she won’t be there
To share my happiest day.

*She exits with Munna.*

The human aspect of Nisha’s suffering is, of course, greatly heightened by the fact we are aware that both Nisha and her mother are talking at cross-purposes. When Kamla speaks of the circumstances in which her daughter is to be married as ‘not ideal’, we know Nisha will attribute this, solely, to the painful loss of her sister, for she has no reason to believe anything else. And again, when her mother asserts: “You’ll have children of your own. Brothers and sisters for Munna”, we are not surprised, for it is clear that any child of Nisha’s would be considered as kin to Munna. In the theatre, such dialogue - the conflictual nature of the conversation - served to increase tension by drawing audiences closer to Nisha’s plight. This was further reinforced - as several audience members confirmed - by the delicacy with which the two actresses approached their roles. Harvey Virdi, as Kamla, brought a warmth and subtlety to the part which allowed audiences to ‘see’ and ‘believe’ in the pride, and at the same time, the feelings of anxiety she has for her daughter.
And Mala Ghedia's skilful displays of tenderness and of humility added truth and meaning to the already emotionally charged content of the scene.

It follows that it was as 'passive' consumers and not 'critical' observers that we, as audience members, were encouraged to participate in this scene. In this way, we became 'totally' involved, and identified with the characters, as well as their plights and emotions. Unlike the audiences who participate in the Bubble or Outside Edge's performances, then - where the spectator's passivity is challenged - spectators in 'Tamasha's theatre' are drawn into 'theatrical illusions', and are enticed - by the actors/actresses skilful shows of artistry - into accepting that what is happening on stage is 'real'. In further contrast to the Bubble and Outside Edge - which seek to blur the distinctions between audiences and performers - Tamasha's utilisation of proscenium staging enforced the separation of actors and spectators, and in this, also positioned viewers just outside of Prem and Nisha's love affair.

It follows that in manipulating proscenium staging and the naturalistic style of acting as Western theatre conventions, Tamasha was able to tailor Fourteen Songs to needs of 'particular' audiences. In doing so, however - and thus departing from traditional community theatre practice in ways which accentuate the company's 'mainstream' characteristics - Tamasha falls prey to much of the same criticisms - i.e., not accessible, characterised by spectatorial passivity, etc - that are often levelled at established theatre.

7.5.3 The Mainstreaming of Fourteen Songs: Music and Casting

The impulse to mainstream Fourteen Songs is also echoed in the taped music design of the production, a mix of Western influenced pop and South Asian instrumentations. The resulting funky, rhythmical beats saw audiences nodding their heads and tapping their feet in clear appreciation. The
introduction of high energy dance routines in the re-staging, further reinforced such aural delights. The more interesting analysis in this respect is possibly, to quote reviewer, John Thaxter, 'the new chorus of slender young dancers', who, cast against ethnic type raise interesting questions about Fourteen Songs' integration into the mainstream. It follows that whilst (presumably) more 'natural' fits for dancers - who first appear as women cricketers and then as bridal friends and wedding guests - could have been found, Melody Woodhead (British/White); Sara Leone (Italian/White'); Rachel Tanh (British/ East Asian); and Nadia Boussir (part Swedish, part South American), were recruited. While this may be in keeping with Tamasha’s 'intercultural' objectives, what I found interesting, was the fact that in the performance, the girls (with the exception of Rachel) wore bronzing make up, which, more than achieving the appearance of South Asians, seemed to affect the 'Euroasian' look.

The casting of the new leads, Pushpinda Chani and Mala Ghedia, whose conventional good looks secured their roles as Prem and Nisha is in line with this. Perhaps not coincidentally, Mala has appeared in, amongst other things, the highly popular Australian soap, Home and Away. That she is one of a small number of non-white actors/actresses to feature in the drama, speaks more of the actresses' conventionally, marketable beauty - that is, facial characteristics that are more akin to those of 'White' Europeans - than of anything else. In fact, when in rehearsals, I first came across this information, I was hard pressed to recollect an episode of the soap that featured an actress of South Asian appearance. This, being a rare occurrence, should have, I reasoned, registered somewhere in my imaginary, but it had not.

Yet all this relates to, in one sense, the casting practices of many directors, in whom we frequently see - via our television screens - the desire to cast non-

'White' actors/actresses in ways which promote their assimilation into the dominant 'White' culture. Thus, a recurring image is that of very fair skinned 'Black' actors/actresses, as opposed to the more dark skinned actor/actress being cast in parts designed to be played by a 'Black' person (although this phenomenon is more apparent in parts for black women). Or, as was probably the case with Mala, casting actors/actresses whose physical attributes will appeal to 'White' audiences. Thus Pushpinda Chani's commercial good looks can be seen in a recent TV ad for soap powder, where his appearance as a charismatic waiter is designed to resonate with ('White') British audiences. It comes as no surprise then, that in Tamasha's desire to reach diverse audiences, Pushpinder and Mala were successfully recruited for the play. Moreover, perhaps the fact that these, as well as other actors/actresses involved in Fourteen Songs, were associated with the media - their credits include The Bill, The Liver Birds, 2.1 Children and Casualty - this attracted a 'star-led' quality. In bringing audiences into the theatre, this may have further encouraged audiences to endow the actors/actresses with presence and charisma.

To conclude this section, Landon-Smith and Buchar's efforts to mainstream Fourteen Songs by reinterpreting it through a more cosmopolitan performance aesthetic, can be seen as part of the company's wider mission to become an integral part of the established theatre in Britain. From this perspective, the show's use of English and Indian colloquialisms, set design, acting style, stage convention, music and casting, etc - in facilitating a correspondence between both Asian and non-Asian spectators - made this objective reachable. The balance between Tamasha's mainstream objectives and the company's commitment to Asian audiences, however, is not so easily realised, as I shall demonstrate in the following section.
7.6 Cultural Frictions

The 'burden of representation' is often presented as the encumbered load carried by culturally specific theatre companies, which, in meeting the needs of their specific culture, are often ghettoised and/or rendered marginal to mainstream practices. For Tamasha, becoming an integral part of mainstream theatre takes the company out of the ghetto of an Asian subculture and places it into an equally problematic area for Asian and mainstream audiences alike. Thus, whilst the artistic horizons of such companies are, to a certain extent, broadened, relationships with their respective communities can be somewhat strained. Suman Bhuchar gives an example of the tension I am talking about when she explains that:

“...[T]here are some things that the company can’t do. We can’t go down to Cornwall and perform at a function, which sometimes people want you to do ... Or, ‘can you do a play for one day’? And you know, you can’t do that, so you know that upsets people. We don’t really want to upset them, but it’s a bit difficult to explain that we are, that Tamasha works in the context of its peer group, which is like the theatre community of this country. So its artistic product is the same, and therefore with the best will in the world, we couldn’t really go there, unless you wanted to pay lots of money to have it, which means it’s counter productive for you...” \(^{17}\)

And similarly, Kathy Bourne relays:

“...[Y]ou know, Asian audiences turn up late; Asian audiences wander around the theatre; Asian audiences bring food in; and all these things, you know, the theatre front of house manager is sort of getting..., all these things throw them a bit and they feel a bit pissed off about it. But they have to accept that that’s the way people are and you have to accommodate that, as opposed to stamping it out and saying you just don’t do that” \(^{18}\)

\(^{17}\) Interview - Suman Bhuchar.

\(^{18}\) Interview - Kathy Bourne.
These, as well as other aspects I shall go on to highlight, are a distinct feature of what I have chosen to call 'cultural frictions': the tensions largely brought about by a need on the part of community specific theatre companies, to cater for their particular culture whilst also making their work accessible to others.

In the previous section, I outlined the ways in which Fourteen Songs was mainstreamed so as to attend to more diverse audiences. Here, the aim will be to show how such attempts can further complicate understandings for both Asian and non-Asian spectators. Christopher Balme, in articulating the dilemma of intercultural performance, contends:

"...[I]f the cultural material presented is too arcane and esoteric then it will be received by the audience as non-decodable exoticism, which is then absorbed on a purely superficial level. If, on the other hand, the indigenous cultural texts are diluted to conform exactly to the receptive codes of the non-indigenous spectators then they lose that integrity which is so central to their acceptance in their own culture" (1996:186).

I want to emphasise the implications of this statement, as I shall go on to show how closely Balme's descriptions of the 'dilution' and 'conforming' of cultural texts, responds to Tamasha's efforts to satisfy both Asian and non-Asian audiences - the incentive behind which cannot be divorced from the company's assimilationist objectives. To this extent, it should come as no surprise that the production precipitated cultural frictions. An example of this can be seen in the initial impulse to adapt Hum Aapke Hain Koun for the stage. In the very moment of translation from Hindi to English, the production of Fourteen Songs effectively became an exclusive site for English speaking audiences only. Unlike previous productions such as Untouchable, which played in Hindi and English on alternate nights, the "stage ...[in Fourteen Songs] was infused with speech that [instead] attempted to recreate, in English, the particular rhythms of...[Punjabi] dialects" (Verma, 1998:131).

From this, it follows that all songs in the musical were also translated into
English, the fact of which caused much disappointment for some spectators. As this member of the audience reveals:

"I think a lot has been lost in translation. Hindi is a very beautiful language, especially when used in song. Translation into English totally detracted from the beauty of what was being said".\(^{19}\)

In taking English as the medium in which to communicate *Fourteen Songs* then, Kristine and Sudha could be perceived as putting their own ambitions before their culture, and in this way, favouring non-Asian audiences over the cultural source. Of course, such views are likely to be reinforced by the various production choices referred to in section 7.5, which could be seen as a further source of contention. Much of the same sort of argument could be applied, in a more general sense, to Tamasha's formal objectives, and specifically the company's aim to 'produce work of Asian influence on the British stage'. Whilst I do not want to suggest that Tamasha is not fulfilling this aim, the hidden pitfalls of such an agenda should be illuminated. For there is a risk that, in telling stories of 'Asian' significance, the diversity that exist amongst Asian people will be overlooked. The tendency to solely focus on, for example, Asians from a particular part of India, or of a particular religious background, becoming the natural order of play.

The range of reactions to *Fourteen Songs*, whilst reflecting the different levels of awareness amongst those who witnessed the play, also indicates the presence of cultural tensions. Before, however, I consider such responses, it would be interesting to note what Kristine articulated as being her intentions for the production:

"...I think this time round certainly, what we wanted to achieve was that audience's expectations of a middle scale musical, would be met. And so, therefore, the transition from our smaller production to this production had to attend to that, at one level. So the production went

\(^{19}\) Tari Panda - Interview (informal) Asian audience member, 19.02.01.
bigger, *certain things were slightly altered to achieve that*, and I think we did achieve that. I mean for me, in terms of the presentation of the acting etc, it was important that again, the genre was clearly understood and everybody understood how to play that genre. And it was also very important for me as well, that even being in much bigger spaces to last time, that we didn’t lose what it was that last time made the show successful. And what that was, was its sort of simplicity and delicacy and gentleness. And that’s more difficult to achieve in a bigger space. So those were my sort of artistic aims and I think in terms of audience and all that, you know, we wanted to achieve high figures, which we did. And we wanted to achieve a sort of, culturally diverse, mix of audience, which again we did".  

Kristine’s aims for the production are clear: to enlarge the work where necessary so that it fills its stage and expectations of that stage; to remain faithful to the genre of the play; and to achieve a mixed, culturally diverse audience. While such objectives would seem to have been met, audience response to Fourteen Songs tells a different story. During a performance, I often enjoyed watching the intrigue on audience member’s faces. Audiences were, on the whole, Asian. There was, however always a good percentage of non-Asians present, as well as variations in gender and age. When, on the second night of the play’s run at the Lyric, I had plucked up enough courage to ask spectators what they had thought of the production, I was genuinely taken back by the response. This is because invariably all seemed more or less antipathetic towards the production.

A British Asian couple (mid to late thirties) I spoke to described not being drawn into the show at all. They explained that Fourteen Songs *had* to be ‘taking the mick’ out of Bollywood films, which were simply in a category of their own. And they seemed to be saying that that this had been a poor attempt at doing even that. The man of the couple, who seemed generally perturbed by the whole affair, interjected: “I’m just trying to work out who they were trying to reach?” This, I took to mean that he didn’t feel the

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20 Interview -Kristine Landon-Smith (emphasis added).
production was for an Asian audience. The couple’s reaction was to provide something of an exemplar of Asian response to Fourteen Songs. These, I would find ranged from misbelief to total astonishment, as is expressed by Jagdeep (mid to late twenties, also British Asian), below:

“I can’t find anything positive to say about the play. I saw their [Tamasha’s] other one – what do you call it, that... ‘Balti Kings’, and that was really good. So, you know, I thought I’d come and see this one, but it was total crap! I was gonna bring my Mum as well, you know, but she don’t speak English. I’m glad I didn’t - total shit, total shit!”

The impact of Fourteen Songs on this theatregoer could not have been more harshly expressed. When I therefore went on to ask Jagdeep where he felt Landon-Smith and Bhuchar had gone wrong, his reply was particularly telling if brutal. For his explanation seemed to verge on the fact that both Landon-Smith and Bhuchar are ‘half Asian’, and in being so, could not possibly know what Asians want from a performance. Apart from the obvious racial and contradictory implications of this viewpoint, it is revealing of the antagonisms that exist between and within communities. It also presents an extreme illustration of what Balme refers to as the artist’s loss of cultural integrity: ‘that which is so central to acceptance in their own culture’.

Thus, in their bid to penetrate the smokescreen of established theatre, Landon-Smith and Bhuchar’s distillations of Fourteen Songs can be seen as necessitating their ‘loss of face’ with some Asian spectators. It would be misleading, however, to paint a picture that suggests all negative response to Fourteen Songs came from Asian audiences, or, that no Asian spectators

\[21\] Jagdeep - Interview (informal): Asian audience member, 19.02.01.
contributed positive responses. What is clear however, is that reactions from non-Asian viewers - even when not so positive - did not reflect such hostility and anger:

“To be honest, apart from sitting a few seats away from Andrew Lloyd Webber, we found it [Fourteen Songs] rather dull. It was a bit too long and lacked a story to keep us entertained. We found the humour a bit obvious and it was overacted. But we did like the dancing and the music was good although it was a shame it was taped and the singing dubbed…We sort of walked out, probably about three quarters of the way through, but not because it was really bad…it was Valentine’s Day and we really fancied some wine in the bar next door!”

And in a similar vein, another non-Asian viewer reflects:

“I was quite impressed by the lengths they went to, to make it seem real. The story line was a bit predictable, however, pleasant. It wasn’t taxing on the brain, do you know what I mean - nice and simple?”

Perhaps, not surprisingly, it seemed that reactions of a positive nature were largely reinforced by those either directly, or indirectly involved in the production. Sanjay, friend of Mala Ghedia - who played Nisha - could not believe that issues of his life had been staged so accurately. And he couldn't stop quoting lines, in great excitement, he felt had particular resonance, as he emphatically communicates below:

“Ah man, it was great. It was wicked man. You see, you see Prem? Prem man, that was me. And, do you see the close relationship Prem has with his sister in law, Pooja? That is exactly the relationship I have with mine, man. And my brother, my family…it’s so good to see that all personified and everything!”

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22 Vanessa Purser and partner Joel - Interview (informal): non-Asian audience members, 14.02.01.

23 Elroy Stewart - Interview (informal): non-Asian audience member, 14.02.01.

24 Sanjay - Interview (informal): Asian audience member, 16.02.01.
Tensions amongst non-Asian viewers seemed to point to an unfamiliarity with the idiosyncrasies of Asian culture. I would often listen to the play, like a radio play, while I watched the audience. They would start laughing early, usually at the overture to the first scene, which sees Prem and Nisha proclaiming their (pent up) adoration for each other. Nothing unusual there, nearly all the song and dance routines were received in this way. But then there was also what I took to be inappropriate laughter. For example, when Pooja dramatically falls to her death. This, from what I had observed in rehearsals, demanded the spectators to experience what was being presented to them at an emotional, even spiritual level. Yet the event would nearly always be received with trumpets of laughter from certain sections of the audience. On the converse of this, parts of the play that did warrant humorous reactions did not receive them. This could be observed in the numerous references to diabetes - largely affecting Asian communities because of the high sugar content of their foods - throughout the play, which seemed only to strike a chord with Asian spectators. These observations highlight the way different cultural reference points modified understandings of what was being presented. When I asked Kristine whether she had felt people who were not familiar with the idiosyncrasies of Asian culture, could fully appreciate the musical, she reasoned:

“I mean I don’t think that people have to have a knowledge of Bollywood, to me, it’s quite clear that it’s a musical, it’s quite camp, it’s quite kitsch. And I mean you can enjoy that, I don’t think that you have to know that you’re allowed to laugh, whereas some people did say: ‘am I allowed to laugh? I think it’s funny, but am I allowed to laugh?’... But I mean, when the actors are really hitting it, everybody gets it somehow and they don’t quite know, always what they are getting, but they are made to laugh and smile. And that’s because the actors play it well. When the actors don’t play it so well, I personally can hear that in the audience”.

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25 Interview - Kristine Landon-Smith.
Largely dismissing the idea of cultural frictions, for Kristine, audiences 'not getting things' is a sign of the actors/actresses' performance not quite being up to scratch. For me, however, there is no doubt that Tamasha's 'transformations' of Fourteen Songs served - to a large extent - to distance and 'alienate' Asian audiences. This, as I have shown, was reinforced by many of the spectators who discussed their feelings of alienation and exclusion, and attributed such feelings to the production's lack of resonance with Asian people. In assessing the significance of such 'cultural frictions', it is important to consider the dilemma of culturally specific theatre companies, torn between meeting the needs of their specific culture and their own desire for visibility beyond it. Whilst I would not go as far as to say that Tamasha's wishes to integrate into the cultural mainstream, has been pursued with no thought of its culture, it is clear that the 'mainstreaming' of Fourteen Songs has somewhat weakened Tamasha's relationship with the Asian community.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by framing it in relation to chapters five and six. I argued that in contrast to the Bubble and Outside Edge's practical engagements with community theatre, Tamasha utilises more 'subtle' notions of 'community'. I explored this subtler way of thinking about community - initially - in the context of Tamasha's history and then in terms of the company's positioning within the 'Asian' community. An emphasis on the connections between 'Asian consciousness' and cultural identity, and on the tensions between 'community' and artistic freedom, however, brought new meaning and complexity to Tamasha's practice. In this way, I explored how the desire to affirm the presence of an Asian expressive culture became one of the motivating factors behind the company's realisation, and how this in turn involved Tamasha moving in 'mainstream' directions. I have further shown
how Tamasha's integrative aspirations have meant that the company largely employs the term 'community' in a strategic way.

Throughout this chapter, I have made distinctions between the work of Tamasha and that of Tara's. This is because, as well as doing equally crucial work to raise the profile of Asian artistic practice, Tara's approach, attitude and commitment to community theatre, provides an interesting variant on Tamasha's theatre in the community practice. Tamasha's approach to community theatre is characteristically ambivalent. On the one hand, the company derives a notion of 'community', which is based on expressions of 'solidarity', 'unity' and 'commitment'. This is apparent - to a certain degree - in Tamasha's relationships with 'the Asian community', and - to a greater extent - in the company's commitment to 'intercultural drama education'. The latter programmes have centred on a 'holistic' notion of community. In this way, they have encouraged a respect for 'otherness' through an emphasis on the connections and similarities that exist between different cultures. At the same time, the dominant ('White') voice in schools and in education has been challenged, with pupils from 'minority' cultures given a 'real' voice and 'real' position in classrooms.26

On the other hand - and by virtue of the company's intergrationist aspirations - Tamasha has been at the forefront of a move towards British 'mainstream' theatre. In this, the company can be seen to be moving away from 'community theatre' and also 'the Asian community' in the bid to fulfil desires and expectations shaped by the wider established theatrical community. For Kristine Landon-Smith and Sudha Bhuchar, the middle-scale staging of Fourteen Songs was an explicit attempt to raise the status of Asian artistic practice and as such, bridge the gap between Asian and 'White' expressive cultures. Despite the fact that the production was conceived as 'intercultural'...

performance - which in Tamasha’s terms meant that it would be applicable to all cultures - it seemed incompatible with (Asian) audiences’ perceptions and expectations of what an ‘Indian’ production would comprise. What Asian audiences wanted - which, from my conversations with them seemed to centre on a more distinct and authentic portrayal of ‘Indian’ life and culture - seemed at odds with Tamasha’s ideas of artistic integrity. Fully aware that the production would be assessed by more diverse and ‘sophisticated’ audiences, Landon-Smith and Buchar sought to ‘mainstream’ Fourteen Songs. Whilst displaying confidence in the production’s ability to transcend cross-cultural understanding, this also demonstrated a willingness on the part of Tamasha to conform to the terms set by the ‘dominant’ culture and theatre. Yet in Tamasha’s conscious efforts to transform Fourteen Songs, the company move perceptively towards the fulfilment of its integrationist objectives, which in turn responds to the desire to raise the profile of Asian arts in Britain. Such endeavours, however, do not escape the manipulations of stereotype unique to theatre institutions. That is, the damaging views that at once marginalise Asian theatre companies like Tamasha and render their innovative work, unknown and inaccessible:

“It’s funny we were just having a conversation with the Arts Council the other day, and they were saying you know, we feel that; (a) You shouldn’t be moving too quickly; and (b) Should you be performing in large theatres, should you really be doing that? Really actually, you should be performing as a small - scale theatre. Well why, because there’s an audience for the work, and it’s very important to us to encourage a large audience to come and see our work if they want to see it. And in pushing us into small spaces, marginalising our work, we’re not giving people the opportunity to come and see our work”.

In this chapter I have tried to illustrate the relation between ‘community’, culture and social identity. In doing so, I have shown how the obligations of

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27 Interview - Kathy Bourne.
'Asian consciousness' and artistic freedom are difficult to reconcile. And further, how the prestige and cultural dominance of 'established' theatre - in comparison to the less prestigious role 'community theatre' plays - has proved, for Tamasha, the more capable means of demystifying the role of Asians in making theatre.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion

This thesis opened with the character 'Harold Bishop' proposing that the theatre critic, 'Mr Travait' review his community play. The proposition, couched in terms of flattery and endearment, compelled acquiescence, yet it also helped to construct an image of 'community theatre' as a problematic. The first sign that we as readers get of community theatre's problematic status, is Mr Bishop's 'surprise'- amazement, that Mr Travait has returned his call. The second is Mr Bishop's admission that he knew the theatre critic did not (normally) review 'community theatre'. Effectively, what both signs revealed was a tacit assumption that only certain types of theatre - i.e., that which is perceived to have high artistic and professional standards because it occurs in 'traditional' theatre buildings which have proscenium stages and fixed seating - have value. It follows from this, that 'community theatre', which generally occurs outside of theatre buildings and which challenges conventional divides between performers and spectators is routinely branded - by critics, the national press - as a genre devoid of an aesthetic dimension and a category unworthy of 'serious' attention. The full import of Mr Travait's acquiescence, therefore, should now be clear: not only does it challenge - at least 'metaphorically' - stereotypical assumptions about community theatre, but in also refuting such criticisms, it reinforces community theatre's relevance and legitimacy.

In the course of this thesis, I too have tried to show that community theatre is worthy of attention, that it is the product of artistic intent, and that there is much expertise involved in this sphere of work. To make these arguments, I have firstly taken three cuts across theory to examine the 'history', 'theatre' and 'community' of community theatre (Chapter Two: parts one and two), and
two sets of ideas on the geographies of artistic practice (part three). In retaining an historical perspective on theatre in the community, then, part one of chapter two began by exploring the experience of The Combination. By framing this experience within the writings of key theorists and practitioners (i.e., Brecht and Growtowski), as well as various traditions of theatre (i.e., Aristophanes, the medieval morality and mystery plays and Shakespeare), I illustrated the influence of these on The Combination and - in this way - community theatre's development. This understanding of community theatre - the fact that it has been shaped by various traditions and theories - enabled me to derive a notion of the art form which centred on the idea of 'participation'.

Participation, as we have seen, was at the heart of The Combination's practice: from the involvement of audiences through the 'subject matter' of and the issues involved in plays, to the actual 'style' that plays were performed in, participation was seen as a crucial means of delivering a sense of ownership of the theatrical presentation. It follows that these two factors (the subject matter of plays and the style of performance) also alerted us to the dualistic nature of community theatre, which in this particular instance centred on distinctions between 'text' and 'practice'. While The Combination's endeavour to stage plays that audiences could be involved in in an 'intellectual' and 'informed' way was seen to correspond with the idea of 'text', the company's concern to disrupt 'narrative authority', by performing in 'non theatre-venues' to 'non theatre-going' audiences, was linked to the idea of 'practice'.

Using The Combination's work to compare the historical context of community theatre with the contemporary scene, I turned to the writings of Steven Gooch and Eugene van Erven (part one, section 2.2.2), which have provided my frames of theoretical reference on 'contemporary' practices of
community theatre. Here I argued that while the concept of participation did feed into later practices of community theatre, The Combination's experience is not reflected in the practices of modern-day community theatre companies. I further argued that present day companies are multifarious: there are many community theatre companies in existence, which subscribe to a variety of competing notions of 'community'. Investigating the 'theatre' of community theatre in the later stages of part one (section 2.2.3), has also allowed me to draw some general conclusions about theatre in the community. Thus in analysing the relationship between 'theatre' and 'performance', I have suggested that the 'theatre' of community theatre can, on one hand refer to textual performance in theatre buildings. On the other hand, it can refer to the dismantling of textual authority, challenging divides between actors/actresses and audiences and performance which occurs outside of theatre buildings.

This thesis has also stressed the importance of 'community' to conceptions of community theatre (chapter two, part two). As I have shown, romanticised conceptions of community have their origins in the work of Ferdinand Tonnies (1887), and were later reflected in the writings of Wirth (1938) and Frankenberge (1966). From these perspectives, 'community', which sealed people's identification with place, created a sense of belonging within localities, and secured in individuals a willingness to work together and cooperate, was deemed a 'harmonious' construct. However, as we have seen, other writers (for example, Massey 1994,1995; and Hall, 1992), have argued against older and regressive representations of collectivity, to position 'community' as a dynamic process in which difference is challenged and contested. Holding together these two facets of the argument enabled me to argue that 'community theatre' is as much about harmony as it is about contestation.
A major theme of this thesis has been the 'cultural geographies of community theatre' (Chapter two, part three). As I have shown, geographical studies of the arts have tended to dwell in the realm of the textual, and have been isolated from a broader understanding of the ways in which the arts are socio-spatially constituted (section 2.4). In exploring work - for example, Nagar (2000), Mattingly (2001) and Rose (1997) - which has embraced the socio-spatial constitution of theatre, however, I have argued that such work sets the agenda to change the way theatre should be theorised in regards to space and place. I have further suggested that the language of theatre and performance - i.e., 'performativity' - can inform geographers seeking to engage with more embodied geographies (section 2.4.1). These ideas of moving beyond the textual were developed through an exploration of community theatre's geographies (section 2.5). As we have seen, an attention to the literatures on community theatre enabled me to reflect upon and document the geographical dimensions of community theatre. I have further argued that examining the material and imaginary geographies of community theatre can inform the cultural turn in geography.

This way of thinking about theatre in the community - i.e., in terms of its 'history' and of it being inextricably linked to 'theatre' and 'community' - has had a number of implications. It illuminated the dualisms of text/practice, harmony/contestation, representation/presentation, which frame community theatre practice. It indicated how community theatre might be conceptualised. It revealed the complexity and multileveled meaning of community theatre. This last point has proven especially important to the development of the project. Thus we have seen in chapter three (section 3.3.1) particularly, how I have had to expand my definition of theatre in the community to cover the full range of community theatre companies operating in London.
Building on the issues raised in chapter three - concerning the kinds of community theatre companies interviewed and the nature of the interviews (section 3.3.2 and 3.3.3) - and on the theoretical insights of chapter two (part one, section 2.2.2), I offered an in-depth analysis of contemporary approaches to community theatre (chapter four). Here, the main emphasis has been placed on the heterogeneity of community theatre companies, and on the different forms of 'community' that characterise community theatre practice (sections 4.2.1 - 4.2.5). By discussing the motivations behind community theatre workers becoming involved in community theatre (section 4.2.1.1), I showed how the concern to work with people who were disadvantaged or excluded in some way and the desire to use theatre to help people, became the biographical starting points for many community theatre workers. It is ironic that the impulses behind community theatre workers getting involved in theatre in the community - the sentiment behind which can only be seen as positive - can, in part be blamed for community theatre's low artistic status. However, in examining the artistic efficacy of theatre in the community (sections 4.2.1.2 and 4.2.4.1 - 4.2.4.3), we can understand the derivation of such criticisms. This is because while, as we have seen, community theatre workers are concerned with aesthetics and the attainment of 'high' professional standards, reconciling these objectives with community theatre's participative aims remain a problem.

The notion that all community theatre is substandard and constricted in its artistic outlook, however, is untenable. As I have shown, there are many different kinds of community theatre companies operating in London and specificities - artistic, participative, professional etc., - between them differ widely. Moreover, what unites community theatre companies - i.e., their emphasis on live performance and its ability to reinforce processes of democracy - is what allows theatre in the community to compete with established theatre (section 4.2.1.2). This tension between 'community' and
'established' theatre has been expressed many times throughout the thesis. I must stress, however, that I consider this relation of opposition to exist in an ideological sense. I do not see community theatre or the established form as 'competing' - for audiences or in the market place etc, - in any real sense. The discussions of chapter four and - to a lesser degree - chapters two and three, were intended to raise such issues in the context of a broad overview of community theatre. The chapters which followed (five, six and seven), while extending such debates, offered more detailed explorations of theatre in the community.

Much of this thesis has been concerned with the (socio-spatial) effects of community theatre on participants and audiences, and as such, the different forms of community/communality produced through - and the forms of participation, inclusion, exclusion which characterise community theatre practice. One of my working assumptions has been that a sense of 'community - of 'communality', 'togetherness' - emerges from being part of an audience at theatre. What has been clear from all of the case studies - the London Bubble, Outside Edge and Tamasha - however, is that this assumption offers only marginal insights into the various ways that 'community' is evoked in theatre in the community practice.

For example, in many instances, I have described the circumstances leading to the attainment of 'community' as following a particular pattern. Initially, extensive 'get to know you' periods, which incorporate 'breaking the ice' activities and warm-up exercises, have been seen to reinforce a sense of 'welcoming' community. Then, as participants are given various tasks and have particular obstacles to overcome in the playmaking process, community has emerged through a process of 'struggle and negotiation'. Finally, in the performance phase, which often incorporates both participants and audiences, a sense of 'empowering' community has been engendered. This
pattern has been apparent in the work of the Bubble, Outside Edge, and to a lesser degree, Tamasha. In the context of the Bubble and Outside Edge, for example, I have shown how the 'warm-up' activities in rehearsals for Gilgamesh (pp.177-180), the 'improvisational exercises' in initial workshops for Pandora (pp.194-200), and the 'process of play' in the workshop phase of Harry and Susie (pp.221-230), reinforced a sense of 'welcoming' community which gave meaningful shape to group experiences. As we have seen, those involved in such activities have been able to forge bonds and connect with 'others' through a feeling of shared experience and unity.

The same is true of the actors and actresses involved in Fourteen Songs. My observations during rehearsals for the production revealed how warm-up exercises such as volleyball and the 'clapping game' - while serving as 'breaking the ice' activities - were also crucial in enabling the actors/actresses to establish a 'collective' work ethic. Volleyball had relied upon the willingness of group members to co-operate and work towards a common goal, and the clapping game - which saw members creating various rhythms through clapping - centred on participants working together, listening and 'bouncing off' of the claps which preceded their own.

The use of warm-up/improvisational activities, then, has not been without significance. Indeed, in reinforcing a sense of 'welcoming' community, warm-up periods have also foregrounded a sense of cohesion amongst participants which filtered into other areas of the playmaking process. For instance, in the case of Tamasha, the cohesive elements of the clapping game and volleyball exercises carried over into the performance of Fourteen Songs. In this way, the forging of a strong sense of community and of collectivity in rehearsals - factors Kristine cited as giving live performance its intrinsic value -
encouraged the actors/actresses to 'continue to collectively work well together' in performance.¹

Similarly, in terms of the Bubble and Outside Edge, the process of building trust and strengthening bonds of 'community' during warm-up periods facilitated a sense of coherence and solidarity in the creative and performance process. In the creative process, however, 'community' was reinforced through negotiation and struggle. For example, in rehearsals for Gilgamesh (see pp.180-181) community and professional performers were able to negotiate internal differences of age, ethnicity, gender and artistic ability, and through collective effort and perseverance strengthened the dramatic impact of the production and reinforced bonds between themselves. Likewise, in the workshop phase of Harry and Susie (pp.231-238), the telling and retelling of shared painful experiences not only brought participants closer together, but also provided the raw material of the play. In the performance realm 'empowering' notions of community were engendered. As we have seen, it was in this sense that the performances of Gilgamesh (pp.188-189) and the 'show of work' (p.207) enabled the Bubble's participants to construct themselves as positive, confident people. And also how Outside Edge's forum performances of Harry and Susie allowed for the self-valuing and liberation of individuals (pp.257-258).

These different experiences of community - as a 'welcoming' sense engendered through group warm-ups, a process reinforced through 'negotiation and struggle', and an 'empowering' force experienced through performing - have been illuminating in several respects. First, they suggest that the 'community' produced through the practice and performance of community theatre is embodied in the 'actions' of participants', so that participants do not so much perceive its meaning as 'actively' create it.

¹ Interview - Kristine Landon-Smith: Artistic Director, Tamasha, 2001.
Second, they reveal that 'community' is not fixed or constant but is continuously changing.

Certainly it can also be argued that 'community' changes as participation in performance becomes more frequent and repetitive. This has been partly illustrated in discussions of the different kinds of community produced at various stages of the creative process, but it needs further clarification. To take, then, the experiences of participants in Gilgamesh, I would suggest that the bonds of community which had been forged in the rehearsal process were initially strengthened by a 'spirit of determination', and a sense in which participants were 'in the performance together' (see diary extract: 'The Opening Performance', pp.185-186). Such feelings, which were reinforced through the participants' shared experiences of performing, were palpable in the first week of the production (Gilgamesh ran for three weeks). In the second and third weeks however, and particularly with the productions relocation to Deptford Park and Oxleas Woods, different understandings of 'community' emerged.

Importantly, the staging of Gilgamesh in Deptford Park and Oxleas Woods impacted the participants' sense of solidarity and collectivism in varied ways. In Deptford Park there were cleavages within the performers as many of them knew the area, people in the area etc, and would disappear during technical rehearsals. This also worked to position the participants that stayed at the rehearsals outside of the groups that ventured away together. Also significant is the fact that while the majority of participants had taken part in the performances at Mayflower Gardens, a considerably smaller proportion had elected to perform in Deptford Park. This proved particularly important to some participants whose friends' absences had left them visibly out of sorts. In Oxleas Woods participants seemed more willing to rekindle friendships and reaffirm their collective identity as 'supporting artists'. Yet I think this was
largely to do with the fact that Oxleas Woods was unfamiliar to most performers, which meant they were not as free to explore the surrounding area, which in turn encouraged participants to co-operate and bond with each other. A number of participants that had been away for performances at Deptford Park had returned for the final performances in Oxleas Woods, and this was also seen to generate a sense of unity amongst the performers.

There is a marked difference however, between the sense of collectivity established in the context of Oxleas Woods and that fostered in the first week of performance. In the opening performances 'community' was born out of a willingness to embrace and participate in theatre, it seemed to last for long periods and felt genuine. As participation became arduous and as group dynamics changed 'community' was more difficult to sustain. Nearing the end of Gilgamesh participants seemed to construct a sense of 'community' out of necessity and merely to 'get through' performances. This 'community' was temporary and fleeting, and felt inauthentic. Yet there was another, more threatening side to 'community', which saw participants reinforce their identity as supporting artists and excluding 'other' performers they deemed to be a threat. This 'community', which was born out of the participants' feelings of insecurity and resentment of the level at which they were involved in the production, produced tensions between the participants themselves and the professional actors/actresses. Such tensions are revealed in the following diary extract, which captures the mood surrounding the final performances of Gilgamesh:

<table>
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<th>'The Closing Performances'</th>
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<td>As tensions began to develop, many participants began to air their feelings. The professional actors/actresses had become known as the 'paid lot' and I had become the 'girl doing research'. The participants had become a community within themselves and only certain members were included. A series of outbursts finally resulted in bitter words. One of the participants, Phil, had agreed that he would participate in all of the performances. Then</td>
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in the final week he decided he would take one night out to actually watch the performance himself. This had not gone down well with the other participants (mostly those who had been around from start to finish), who by now had formed ‘a united front’ - highly charged and full of conviction. You were either in their camp or you were not: to be in their camp you had to ‘perform’ in *Gilgamesh* never ‘observe’, you were unpaid, and you didn’t mix with the professional performers. It goes without saying that because I had also taken time out of performing to observe, both Phil and myself were expelled from the ‘group’. This, however, did not last for long, just long enough for the participants’ tempers to cool and for their sense of pride to be restored.

Research Diary 11.08.00

From the experiences of the participants in *Gilgamesh*, we can see that ‘community’ changes at particular moments, and in particular contexts of performance. This has also been apparent from my observations of the actors/actresses involved in *Harry and Susie* and *Fourteen Songs*, where a sense of ‘community’ was seen to characterise initial performances, but changed and even dispersed as performances were repeated.

If the dynamism of community has been one of the central themes of this thesis, then the ‘cultural geographies of community theatre’ has been another. The three cases I have drawn upon amply illustrate the different and varied geographies of community theatre. We can perhaps grasp the nature of these geographies more clearly if we return to some of the arguments of a previous section. The section I would like to draw upon - section 4.2.1 - detailed an approach to ‘community’ in theatre which was defined by place/locality. The theatres examined in this context - the Half Moon and Stratford East - have generated complex and contradictory understandings of community which are of particular relevance to geography. I will now outline the fundamental points of that section so that I can explore them in more detail.
Discussions (see in particular the arguments made in section 4.2.1.3) of the Half Moon and Stratford East's approach to community theatre have offered insight into the geographies of theatre in the community. I have suggested that as theatres based in (the particular localities of) Lime House and Stratford, the Half Moon and Stratford East construct notions of community in terms of boundedness and through promoting a shared understanding of the boroughs - Tower Hamlets and Newham - in which they are based. The local positioning of the Half Moon and Stratford East coupled with the deprivation that characterises Tower Hamlets and Newham, has also generated a particularly romantic image of community and created in people a sense of belonging to place. By discussing the ways in which the 'locally specific' culture of the Half Moon and Stratford East is also shaped by the cultural diversity of East London, I showed how the companies have connected with people through the staging of productions which reflect their diversity and through 'outreach' work in the community. In this way, I argued that the Half Moon and Stratford East's tendencies towards homogenisation were matched by their celebrations of heterogeneity and plurality. As we have seen, such arguments centred on the interplay between the terms 'local' and 'global', local corresponding to the Half Moon and Stratford East's concern to generate an awareness of a local geographic culture, and global to the companies' recognition of the different cultures that exist in East London. Crucially, I suggested that the Half Moon and Stratford East were able to balance both their 'local' and 'global' concerns very successfully.

This discussion of the Half Moon and Stratford East’s constructions of 'local' and 'global' imaginings of community allows us to reflect upon Tamasha’s material and imagined geographies. As I have shown in section 7.3, the particular relationship Tamasha has with the Asian community revolves around a complex articulation of the concept of ‘collective identity’. In one sense the company constructs a notion of collective identity or ‘community’
through imaginative geographies of the local. In this way, Tamasha positions itself as central to the lived experiences of a local, 'London-based' (i.e., North London: Islington; South London: Tooting; East London: Newham; and West London: Ealing) 'Asian community'. An example of this is Tamasha's utilisations of local, homogenous and unified notions of cultural identity, which have been integral to the company's pitch in regards to funding authorities. I have also shown how Tamasha derives a notion of community which is based on much broader connections with Asians from the Indian subcontinent, and who are largely of Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi heritage. Such links have been imagined through shared notions of 'home', and through more 'authentic' expressions of collective identity.

It follows that one of the reasons for revisiting the Half Moon and Stratford East's approach to community theatre is for the light it throws on Tamasha's geographies. Yet if we think explicitly in terms of the companies' engagements with their respective communities, then other things come to light: that is, the reasons the Half Moon and Stratford East are able to engage with their communities at both the 'local' and 'global' level and Tamasha is not. I have previously argued that the bonds which link the Half Moon and Stratford East to their respective communities have been based on the companies' awareness of the socio-economic hardships that characterise Lime House and Stratford, and also on the close proximity of their theatres to the communities in these areas. This closeness has allowed the Half Moon and Stratford East to get involved with the 'struggles' of their communities, and has also meant that people have been able to access their theatres and become involved with the companies' activities.

Tamasha, on the other hand, is a national theatre company that works in the context of the 'British' theatre scene. This means that while the company demonstrates an awareness of and respect for the Asian community, the time
Tamasha spends 'in the community' is often limited and fleeting. Moreover, unlike the Half Moon and Stratford East, Tamasha does not have its own theatre, and this also has implications for the company's involvement in the everyday life activities of the Asian community. In examining Tamasha's more 'global' understandings of shared identity similar tensions have been revealed. Thus I have argued in the context of the company's middle-scale staging of Fourteen Songs (section 7.5), that Tamasha failed to connect with its Asian audiences. Through this production Tamasha sought to affirm the company's Indian subcontinental identity while at the same time redefining it in the terms of cosmopolitan audiences. While possessing a broader appeal the production seemed to alienate Asian audiences, whom did not see themselves or India within Tamasha's depictions. Local reception of what could be considered a 'diasporically' influenced production was therefore poor.

This can be seen in contrast to the positive feed-back the Half Moon and Stratford East have received from their audiences. Though having said that, many of the plays at Stratford East have centred on the affairs of particular communities, and audiences have generally been reflective of the communities portrayed in plays. For example, Sus a political play about police harassment on 'Black' youths, attracted a largely 'Black' audience, and Airport 2000, a comedy about Asian people in airports was well received by an Asian audience (personal interview - Sunda Kangesgan, 01.06.00). This means that while Stratford East's productions do reflect the transcultural experiences and pluralisms of the people in East London, the plays themselves like Stratford East's audiences tend not to be comprised of 'multiple' identities. The audiences that attended Fourteen Songs were in comparison, quite diverse. Does this suggest, then, that in order for Tamasha to have success with its Asian audiences the material, cast and language of
plays should reflect the 'essence of Asianness'? Or does this simply reiterate the tensions between Asian consciousness and artistic freedom?

Returning to the issue at hand - i.e., the cultural geographies of community theatre - we can see that Tamasha's practice is constituted by imaginative geographies of the global, diasporic, national and local. I have also shown how theatre for Tamasha, is not only a space of cultural representation but also a dominant representation of theatrical space. In this way, audiences and performers have been separated, and the spectators' relationships to the stage/performance, has relied, to some degree on distance.

Different geographies characterise the Bubble's approach to community theatre. However, it is possible to see once again, parallels between the role of 'place' in the Half Moon and Stratford East's work and the Bubble's engagement with theatre in the community. The Bubble's relationship to place, like that of the Half Moon and Stratford East, can be defined by proximity and intimacy. In this way the Bubble building is positioned within the everyday, urban environment of Elephant Lane, and many of the Bubble's participants live in the surrounding estates of or in close proximity to the Bubble. Furthermore, the Bubble offices are seen as a home away from home for the staff and participants, and participants (for example, see diary extract entitled: 'The Pride of England', p.184) have used ideas of 'belonging' to define their sense of security within the Bubble premises. Local understandings of community have therefore shaped the meaning and practice of the London Bubble.

At the same time however, and in a similar way to how the Half Moon and Stratford East's practices have been seen to transgress homogenised understandings of community, the Bubble also disrupts notions of fixed, bounded and traditional ideas of place. The most obvious way in which the
company does this is through its utilizations of promenade and site specific theatre. As I have shown, promenade is a moving mobile form of theatre. And site specific performance defines place both literally (in terms of physical, everyday environments) and performatively (in terms of the spaces in which performance occurs). In the context of Gilgamesh, Mayflower Gardens was transformed from a representation of public space to a site of performance. There was, then, an active deployment and reconstruction of social space; what was usually intended for park goers, walkers of dogs etc, became the world of Gilgamesh, the place of performance. In this context, time-space geographies are also significant, because experiences within the park by day are distinctively different by night. By night, the geographical spaces of Mayflower Gardens authenticated a new place, one which had been aesthetically changed to correspond with the different scenes of Gilgamesh.

The promenade performance of Gilgamesh saw actors/actresses playing amongst audiences rather than to them. This provided a more intimate experience of theatre, and created a 'carnival space' with promenaders enjoying themselves and walking in time to the music. Significantly, the promenaders were unlike the imagined community of 'traditional theatregoers' - one which is renowned for its cohesion and sameness; but were instead a diverse group, comprised of a variety of multiple identities. Indeed, for many of these audience members the performance of Gilgamesh was viewed as 'out of place'. This was seen, for example, when a local woman came out of her house and revealed she'd 'never been to a theatre before'. The residents' comments, which seemed to have been influenced by the media's frequent portrayal of 'theatre' as a large building with red glossy curtains etc, clearly gave the impression that theatre happens 'in' not 'outside'. Critically however, because Gilgamesh was staged within the
surrounding estates of Elephant Lane, the performance also transgressed the constructed separations between public and private.

Geographies are also present in Outside Edge's approach to community theatre. As we have seen (pp. 216-251), the workshop/rehearsal space of Outside Edge - as a space designed, both physically and socially, for performers, and as a space of social interaction and bodily performances - was inherently geographical. But also the places of performance (i.e., the rehab centres and community spaces), the social meanings and cultural values suggested by those places were crucial in terms of accessing, participating and being included in, performances. The actual form of theatre Outside Edge engages with - 'forum theatre' - is highly spatialised. Thus, as with the audiences of the Bubble, spectators in Outside Edge's forum performances are spatially and performatively repositioned. There is also close contact between audiences and performers, as the (traditional) division between stage and spectator is eroded. In fact, and as we have seen in the 'turn-around' performance (pp. 257-258), spectator and actor/actress become one - i.e., 'spect-actor', which involves forms of spatial bodily praxis performed by both actors/actresses and audiences.

A major task of this thesis has been, then, to map the 'cultural geographies of community theatre'. Mapping the cultural geographies of the London Bubble, Outside Edge and Tamasha has had an important value in the problematizing of geographical studies which have 'textualised' the arts (see section 2.4). Braun (1993: 76) has noted that, "to focus only on the 'performance' or the 'art object' of [the arts]...is to miss much of their significance". Hence, by focussing on the spatialities of community theatre, this study helps to shift the emphasis away from 'text' towards an understanding of how the experiences of community theatre companies are 'lived' in socio-spatial terms. Such a study has also helped me to recognise the potential of ethnography, and
particularly participant observation, to enhance exploration into theatre and geography.

In studying the socio-spatial experiences of community theatre companies, this thesis has also given voice to a group from whom we seldom hear. I find this silence somewhat strange since the participatory experiences opened up by community theatre serve an important social function. As the cases have shown, participation in community theatre can represent a major dimension in people's lives, it can be motivated by personal agenda or it can be a bit of light relief from everyday life activities. It can be a means of escapism or a way of challenging life. Through participation in community theatre participants have experienced inclusive theatre environments; they have forged friendships that cut across age, race and gender; they have respected difference; and they have attained improved self-esteem. What is more, different participants have brought different degrees of commitment, expertise and talent to participation.

As we have seen many times in this thesis, it is community theatre's concern with the socio-cultural empowerment of participants that has fuelled debates concerning whether it can be considered as 'good' art? And in some ways, my answer to this question has been ambiguous, suggesting that while community theatre does indeed qualify as art, it should not be judged by the criteria of traditional aesthetics. Certainly in the context of geography, community theatre has been 'good' in examining how community is created through practice and performances; how theatre can facilitate new ways of approaching notions of space and spatialised practice; and how marginal forms offer new understandings of dominant discourse. It is hoped that geographers will see the potential of (community) theatre and become increasingly sensitised to its expressive, transgressive, and subversive qualities.
Appendix I

‘The Interview Schedule’

A) Biography

1. What inspired you to get involved with/start the group?

2. Can you tell me a little about the group? (eg, how long has the group been around; what sort of things have you worked on in the past/ at the moment?)

3. How are performers recruited?

4. Are you a funded organisation?

B) Aims/Objectives

5. What would you say the aims of the group are? Would you say they contrast in any way to the aims of mainstream theatre?

C) On Community

6. What does community mean to you? (Do you think all theatre strives for community?)

D) Community, Acting Style and Audience

7. What acting style do you adhere to? (naturalistic, Brechtian, Artaudian, your own style?)

8. Where do performances normally take place?
9. What kind of audience do you attract? 
   (do you strive to attract a particular type of audience?)

E) Other Groups

10. What other kinds of community theatre groups do you know of?

11. Would you say that there is an ethos of 'community' amongst community theatre groups or is there a competitive edge to the work you do?

12. Do you feel funded groups are more restricted - in terms of the kinds of work they do - than groups that are not?
Appendix II

‘Pandora (scenes 1 - 3)’

Scene one
(Ensemble, as birds, enter the stage, flying at differing speeds, Pandora lies on the ground. Sitting up)

Pandora
A day on earth has passed, slumbered in the ground, whilst the birds fly over head, never to be seen by my eyes again. And as I awaken to the night I recall meeting you yesterday. I recall saying a firm no to your request. David, I will never write out for you the story of my mortal life, how I became a vampire. How I came upon Marius only years after he had lost his human life.

Now here I am with your notebook open, using one of the sharp pointed eternal ink pens you left me.

(Ensemble change to using books, writing with them)

Naturally David you would leave me something elegant. And inviting page

Choral
Naturally David you would leave me with something elegant. And inviting page

(Ensemble begin to make scratching sounds)

Pandora
Even the sound of the pen has its allure, the sharp scratch, ah, the sound. The only thing missing here is the smell of ink. Writing; making as fine and deep a black mark as I choose to make.

(Ensemble freeze)

Narration
She is thinking about your request in writing. You will get something from her. She is yielding to it. Almost as one of our human victims yield to us.

(Ensemble start to move in slow motion, reaching for their victim)

Chorus
Like the act of drinking blood itself.

Narration
She reaches now for a victim who is not easy to overcome. Her own past. She seeks now a victim that she has never faced. And there is the thrill of the hunt in it.

(Ensemble arrange around the stage, some dead some about to some taking life, Mother, Father, 5 brothers from where they are begin to slow motion and call to her softly, Pandora, Pandora…

Why else would she see those times so vividly now? You had no magic potion to loosen her thoughts. There is but one potion for her, and that is blood.
How could have kindled in her this longing to go back two thousand years?
How could origins so deeply buried and so long denied suddenly beckon to her?

A door snaps open, a light shines, come in...

(Ensemble snaps into action, creating the café around Pandora)

Narration 2 She sits back now in the café.

She writes but pauses and looks around at the people of Paris. She sees the drab unisex fabrics of this age, the fresh American girl in her military clothes. All her possessions slung over her shoulder in a back pack.

American (speak thoughts)

Narration He lives in his eyes. He has not touched a women in ten years.

Chorus She sees these mortals in a more attentive light

Narration The inevitable cocaine dealer, who waits for his contact in the far corner.

Coke dealer (speaks thoughts)

Narration He makes those quick impatient gestures, he twists and turns, he cannot be comfortable. He wants to leave to snort his cocaine for which he burns and yet he must wait for the contact.

Pandora I think he will die tonight, this man.

Narration She remembers the night before, and her reason for sitting here.

(Ensemble create bridge and water)

Pandora When you found me last night, I was alone over the bridge over the Seine, walking in the last dangerous darkness before dawn.

Narration He saw her before she knew he was there. Her victim stood at the railings, no more than a child, but bruised and robbed, she wanted to die in the water.

(Chorus singing whilst bridge scene enacted)

David Pandora, may we speak?

Forgive me Pandora, please be kind enough to take time with me. I know we have to part soon. The sun will rise shortly. But if you'll agree, I'll come to you tomorrow, in the café where you sit every night. Let us talk to each other.

Pandora So you have seen me there?

David Often, Yes.
Pandora we have the world don't we?

Pandora I don't know David?

Why haven't you come to me before? In the café, where it's warm and lighted?

David It seemed a far more outrageous intrusion. People go to such places to be alone. I did not mean to be the voyeur. It was an accident we saw each other at this moment.

Pandora That is charming David. It is a long time since anyone has charmed me;

I will meet you tomorrow night, But do tell me why?

David I want to ask you something, I want you to write your story for me; in these notebooks. Write about the time when you were alive. The time when you and Marius came together.

Pandora Why in the world would you want this for me?

David I want to know what we can learn. So I come to you, a child of the millennia, a vampire who drank from the blood of queen Akasha herself, one who has survived two thousand years, and I ask you Pandora, beg you, please write your story for me.

Pandora David you ask too much, I cannot.

Narration But watch her as she does...

(Ensemble sweep Pandora back into her past, books and birds)

Scene two

(Ensemble clear to reveal the image of a mother and a father awaiting birth of their first child, two attendants stand by assisting in the birth)

Narration The time is 15BC, Rome,

A rich Senator, His wife, awaiting the birth of their first child

(See image of a son being born held up to the sky)

Father My son

(As the father places each baby on the ground each son appears, seated.)

Narration A second child

(See image of a son being born held up to the sky)

Father My son

Narration A Third. (Father's arms raised to the sky)

Fourth (arms raised)
Fifth   (arms raised)

Narration  till finally...

Father  Thank the gods, a little darling.

Pandora  Whenever I did bad things my brother's would goad me

(Images of Pandora doing wrong and echo of thank the gods a little darling)

Pandora  My mother died when I was two so I never knew her, never missed her, hardly remembered her.

Narrator  And life for the rich in Rome at that time was easy

The streets a colourful clutter of people where Pandora would stroll with her father,

(see street scene, Pandora and father walking through)

Banquets at which Pandora would recite poetry she had learnt

(form banquet shape, and Pandora reciting to an enthralled audience)

Pandora  "Before the gates the Grecians took their post,
And all the pretence of late life was lost.
I yield to Fate, unwilling retire,
And, loaded, up the hill convey my sire".

Narration  And the great test of character placed on all children – The Roman Arena.

(See Pandora watching Gladiators)

Pandora  A vile practice and to allow a ten year old to watch it you may think this is barbaric, but now in the twenty first century when I watch the endless slaughter on television throughout our Western world, at times this seems to me an unbroken series of gladiatorial fights or massacres. Video footage of actual war, cameras passing over heaps of bodies, skeletal children sobbing. I think we look because we are afraid, but in Rome you learnt to look so you would be hard.

(Pandora sees Marius)

Pandora  Marius
Why are you so tall?

Marius  My precious one, I'm tall because I'm a barbarian
(makes a claw like a bear, flirtatious)

Pandora  No truly, you can't be a barbarian, my family is always talking about you, saying only nice things of course.

Marius  Of that I am sure
Pandora: Give my love to the great poet Ovid, (begins to recite a poem from Ovid)
She laughed and gave her best whole hearted kisses,
She seemed possessed of knowledge that was knew
They pleased too well - bad sign, her tongue was in them
And my tongue was kissing too

Father: That’s it Pandora, you are ten years old, wrap up

Marius: (dropping to knees and kissing her had) I will give Ovid your love, little Pandora.

(Pandora leaves as father forces her to go she waves goodbye)

Marius: Goodbye little Pandora

(Marius whispers to her father)

Father: You are out of your mind. (Turns back to Marius)

Narration: It was five years before Pandora saw Marius again. So far she had escaped marriage, though since she was 12 she was eligible, and time was running out.

(The Roman market. Pandora with her farther, sees Marius in the crowd, leaning against a tree writing. He looks at her then back to his book.)

Pandora: Look father, there is our barbarian friend, the tall one, and he’s writing.

Father: Marius is always writing, Turn around Pandora, be still.

Pandora: But he looked at me father, I want to talk to him.

Father: You will not. You will not grace him with one small smile

Pandora: If you are going to marry me to someone, if there is no way short of suicide that I can avoid this disgusting development, why don’t you marry me to Marius? I don’t understand it, I’m rich he’s rich…

Father: Pandora behave

Pandora: Father Please let me speak to him

Father: Pandora, I know this is hard for you, but the emperor himself would not approve of you marrying such a mad wandering historian as Marius. It is quite impossible. When you marry you will marry well.

(Pandora turns to look at Marius who is staring at her, Pandora runs to him)

Pandora: Well I wanted to marry you, but father has said no
Father       How now Marius, how goes it with you? Come along Pandora

(drag Pandora away)

Narration      Twenty years would pass before they meet again, and in that time Pandora entered into the worship of the goddess Isis.

Scene three
(This scene is a puppet show of the story of the Goddess Isis)

Narration       Osiris, the great king of Egypt, teaching his people the great art of cultivation.

His wife Isis, who rules vigilantly and peacefully by his side.

God and goddess of a happy world.

If it were not for Seth. Wicked brother, jealous of Osiris's virtue and fame.
A plan is hatched.

Seth constructs a beautiful chest, presents it. Whoever can fit in the chest will own it.

Osiris lays down. Seth leaps, nails the lid, seals it, flings it deep into the Nile.

Isis morns, searches far and wide,

The chest sweeps out to sea. Reaches the banks of some far off town, lodges in the branches of a tree, which quickly grows enclosing it, hidden.

The tree is felled, made into a pillar of the kings palace.

Isis finds it. Presents herself to the king. Feeling the presence of her love she transforms herself into a swallow and flies around the pillar mournfully singing.

She rips the tree apart, drags out the chest, flies off to a deserted place. Alone she tears it open, lays her head on her dead husbands. And weeps.

Later she hides the chest in the marshes.

Seth discovers it. Opens it, tears the body into 14 pieces and scatters it around the country.

Isis searches, where- ever she finds a part of his body she buries it with all the ritual a god deserves.

She recovers 13 pieces, one missing. His genital member never found.

Some say she fanned his dead body with her wings and brought him back to life. Some say his missing phallus is what makes the Nile so fertile. Some say he judges the souls of the dead in the underworld.

But many worship the goddess Isis for her strength and her love.
(Pandora reaches for the puppet Isis and carries it to another place where she kneels before it).
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