Participatory Theatre as Democratic Space

Opportunities and Limitations

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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The Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity

August 2020

The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own, including work which has formed part of jointly authored publications. The contribution of the candidate and the other authors to this work has been explicitly indicated below. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

In chapter 2 of this thesis I outline an original theoretical framework for a useful democratic space, which is then used throughout this thesis. An earlier version of this framework is also used in the following jointly authored paper:

> Cunningham, M., & Lechelt, E. (2020). The Politics of Participation in Cultural Policy Making. *Conjunctions: Transdisciplinary Journal of Cultural Participation, 8*.

This framework was my original contribution to this paper. This paper also includes evidence from an empirical study exploring cultural policy making in Calgary, this empirical work was conducted by Elysia Lechelt, and this work is not included in this thesis.

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Acknowledgements

There are many people who supported this thesis. From the strangers who gave me their time, energy and reflections in interviews, to brief conversations with people 'in-the-know' on Twitter, to my family and friends. Without all this support this thesis could not have been written, and it is important to name a few key players who need special thanks and apologies.

To my dad and sister, for listening and trying to understand my ramblings when I didn't really understand them myself. To my mum, who is the ultimate reason I do what I do, and care about what I care about. Thank you for all your reading suggestions and I'm sorry for my frequent lack of graciousness. To Joe, with whom I talked through every argument, question and frustration. Thank you for your patience, careful eye and making me laugh even in the days before submission. And Hobie, for needing walks.

To my friends. Elspeth, Charlie and Becky thank you for your PhD sympathies and advice. To KJ, for very useful conversations, too much coffee and for never ending enthusiasm and positivity. To Sarah, for allowing tangents and complaints, and providing wine. To Elysia and Mark, for your wit and solidarity.

To my colleagues, from the world of theatre: Teo Greenstreet, Ruth Nutter, Nicky Childs, Tim Wheeler, Terry O'Leary and Michael Chandler. And from within academia, Holly Ryan, Zelda Hannay, Frances Babbage, Sarah Weston, Marit Hammond, Tim Jackson and the whole CUSP network. Thank you to Dan, who messaged this PhD opportunity to me on Twitter.

And finally, to my supervisors, Professor Kate Oakley and Dr Beth Johnson. Thank you for allowing my much-needed journeys down dead-ends and for teaching me how to be a researcher.

Abstract

In this thesis I examine the potential opportunities and limitations presented by participatory theatre as a form of democratic space. I argue that neoliberal policies and a pervasive neoliberal rationality (Brown, 2015) have undermined democracy in the UK. This comes at a time when we require a more inclusive, deliberative and imaginative democracy to face the double threat of widening inequalities and climate change. In this thesis I argue that democracy is a crucial component of the move toward a sustainably prosperous society. With this context in mind, I draw on the work of democratic theorists (including Arendt, [1959] 2019; Freire, [1968] 1996; Young, 2000) to build a theoretical framework for a useful democratic space, which can help to overcome the limitations placed on democracy by neoliberalism. This framework includes five key elements: inclusivity, listening and exchange, discourse on the common good, imagination and a belief in alternatives and political efficacy.

This thesis explores two in-depth case studies of participatory theatre events (*Cathy,* by Cardboard Citizens and *We Know Not What We May Be* by METIS), as potential examples of democratic spaces. Participatory theatre has a rich political history (Bishop, 2012; Boal, 1979), yet this practice remains largely unexamined within democratic theory and the study of political participation. I argue that theatre sector-wide limitations, including issues of inclusivity and policy impact, make it impossible for these case studies to be straightforwardly defined as useful democratic spaces. However, this approach to creating and facilitating democratic spaces can provide distinctive opportunities for citizens to exchange ideas and values with strangers, in a way that includes alternative approaches to discourse (for example, emotional and non-verbal contributions). Participatory theatre events also offers significant opportunities in terms of imagining alternatives, given that their starting point is a fictional world. Overall, whilst there are sector-wide limitations to this approach, the case studies explored in this thesis are instructive in terms of how to create and facilitate inclusive, deliberative and imaginative democratic spaces.

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List of Abbreviations

ACE – Arts Council England

CEO – Chief Executive Officer

CC – Cardboard Citizens

CTO – Theatre of the Oppressed Rio de Janeiro

CUSP – The Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity

DCMS – Department of Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

LT – Legislative Theatre

TO – Theatre of the Oppressed

TONYC – Theatre of the Oppressed New York City

We Know Not – *We Know Not What We May Be*, by METIS

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This thesis constructs an original framework to examine democratic spaces and applies this framework to participatory theatre events. In so doing, this research aims to contribute original tools and insights to the study of participatory democracy and the political role of theatre. . I have conducted two in-depth case studies, employing participant observation, interviews and assessing quantitative data, with two very different participatory theatre projects. The first with Cardboard Citizens on their Forum and Legislative Theatre production of *Cathy,* and the second with METIS on their performance installation *We Know Not What We May Be.*

This research sits within The Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity (CUSP). The fundamental motivation for CUSP, as well as for this thesis is the understanding that to avoid the catastrophic impacts of climate change, and to address the entwined issue of accelerating global (and national) inequality – we need to do things differently. A key aspect of 'doing things differently' is governance and democracy. As Director of CUSP Tim Jackson puts it, we must "sweep away the short-term thinking that has plagued society for decades – to replace it with considered policy capable of addressing the enormous challenge of delivering a lasting prosperity" (Jackson, 2017, p. 22). How 'prosperity' is understood within this context differs from the current common usage, which generally understands the term in the context of economic wealth. Tim Jackson (2017), amongst others, understands the concept in relation to Nussbaum and Sen's (1993) 'capabilities approach' and notions of 'human flourishing' (which in turn originate in Aristotle's moral philosophy). Nussbaum (2003) is consistent in her inclusion of democracy within her lists of capabilities necessary for human flourishing: "being able to participate effectively in political choices that govern one's life; having the right of political participation, protections of free speech and association" (p. 43). However, the relationship between democracy and environmental sustainability is complex and, at times, problematic. In this thesis I argue that lasting environmental sustainability depends on a deliberative, imaginative and inclusive democracy. I will address this relationship in more detail

later in this chapter.

There is an established body of research which links that arts and democracy. This literature has built the link in relation to emotional provocation (Ahmed, 2004; Nussbaum, 2013; Plato, [375 BC] 2003), propaganda (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008; Thompson, 2017), protest and disruption (Bishop, 2012; Brecht, [1964] 2018), and, to a lesser extent, its role within policy- making and formal governance itself (Boal, 1998; Mattern & Love, 2013). I offer a review of this literature and detail how it relates to this research in chapter 3. Overall, this project "flows from a recognition that art, creativity and cultural activity are not just instrumental means towards sustainability, but integral components of prosperity itself" (Oakley, Ball, & Cunningham, 2018, p. 1), and a crucial aspect of this is its civic and political role.

In this research, I will offer an original contribution to both the study of democratic participation and the study of the socio-political role for the arts by focussing on the potential role for participatory theatre in creating useful democratic spaces. Democratic spaces are opportunities[1] for citizens to come together to discuss the common good, prefigure alternative futures and invite multiple forms of political expression. In chapters 2 and 3 I offer comprehensive definitions of the terms 'participatory theatre' and 'democratic spaces', as well as situating them within the literature investigating democratic participation (in particularly deliberative democracy), and the socio-political role of the arts. This research sits at the nexus between these two fields of study, and aims to contribute original insights to both by examining distinctive and useful approaches to creating democratic spaces, and drawing out the opportunities and limitations of participatory theatre in creating these spaces.

[1] These opportunities can take the form of physical and digital 'spaces'.

This thesis addresses one primary and two secondary research questions. These questions guide both the theoretical and empirical exploration of this research:

Primary

- Can participatory theatre create a useful democratic space?

Secondary

- Is there anything distinctive about participatory theatre as an approach to creating democratic spaces?
- What are the limitations to this approach to democratic spaces?

It is important to note that the relative terms within these research questions, i.e. 'useful', 'distinctive' and 'limitations', will be explained in Chapter 2 and developed throughout this thesis. They are in reference to the original framework of democratic spaces constructed as part of this research.

In this chapter, I will offer the rationale for this project by briefly exploring the relationship between democracy and sustainability, as well as the role theatre has played in democracy. I will conclude this chapter with a brief chapter summary of what follows.

1.1 The relationship between sustainability, environmentalism and democracy

> "Sustainable prosperity raises particular questions for the nature of democracy in the context of the need for urgent action related to averting environmental disaster, and the need to intellectual freedoms that challenge dominant interests and present social and political alternatives" (Jackson et al., 2016, p. 13).

There are conflicts between the need for radical and immediate action on environmental crisis, and the realities of democracy. The first conflict relates to time – the required urgency of action on environmental issues is well known and it would seem that slow moving democratic processes are ill-suited to addressing this urgency. Furthermore, "electoral time frames (4/5 years) tend to lead to a preoccupation with the immediate and short-term as parties compete for votes and defer potentially unpopular longer-term policy initiatives" (Smart, 2019).

Secondly, democracy is fundamentally a process, whereas environmental issues are generally concerned with outcomes – ‘to advocate democracy is to advocate procedure, to advocate environmentalism is to advocate substantive outcomes: what guarantee can we have that the former procedures will yield the latter outcome?’ (Goodin, 1992, p. 160).

There have been a number of accounts which seek to overcome, redefine or minimize these conflicts. For example, deep ecological citizenship and the decolonisation of democracy both seek to recognise the rights of non-humans (including animals, plants, rivers and mountains), and highlight the patriarchal and colonialist nature of our dualistic approach to the human and non-human worlds (Nixon, 2011; Schlosberg, Backstrand, & Pickering, 2019). In this account “inclusivity has to go beyond humanity to encompass other species and the ecosystems on which we all depend” (Smart, 2019, p. 33). With a radical re-imagining of who and what has the rights of citizenship within society, environmentalism becomes embedded in the procedure of democracy. For example, if we understood non-human entities to have rights, based on the integral ecological role they play, their destruction would take on a new kind of legal and symbolic significance. This theory challenges the notion of humans as the dominant species, separate from nature, with the right to destroy and use resources, as well as challenging the notion of humans as benevolent protectors of the earth. From this perspective, the natural world has rights, as well as social/ecological roles to perform, and their citizenship contains both these rights and responsibilities, like human citizens.

Other environmentalist perspectives have maintained the current distance between humans and non-humans (in terms of rights and citizenship), but emphasised deliberation and discourse within policy-making as a force for achieving sustainability. John Dryzek (2014; Dryzek & Pickering, 2017) is a key contributor to this line of argument. He argues that reflexivity is key to environmental governance, but is currently lacking in ‘many if not all of the dominant human institutions that developed in the late Holocene’. He states, “the key problem with dominant political and economic institutions such as states, corporations and markets is that they are not reflexive… particularly with regards to their environmental impacts” (2017, p. 356). For Dryzek and Pickering (2017),

deliberation is the most effective method by which to stimulate reflexivity, precisely because it provokes difficult binaries (such as public participation vs expertise, or diversity vs consensus). Dryzek and Pickering offer various international examples of deliberative practices resulting in sustainable policy – often with greater care for the environment over economic factors than standard policy procedures. Overall, they argue that deliberative processes within policy-making (within intergovernmental advisory groups, as well as local government initiatives) is an important tool in generating progressive policy on environmental issues, as 'reflexivity requires scrutiny of normative commitments and core values – not just of practices and results' (ibid. p.359).

Marit Hammond (2019) argues that in order to build a sustainable society there must be "not just progress on specific environmental problems, but also a general propensity for structural transformation is needed for sustainability in this deeper sense" (p. 173). Whilst she agrees that deliberative policy-making initiatives play an important role in addressing global environmental issues, she argues that Dryzek's proposal focuses too heavily on one-off events and narrowly instrumentalises the practice of deliberative democracy. Instead of these specific cases, there must be a broader *deliberative culture.* Rather than depicting democracy as a procedural process and sustainability as a desired policy outcome (as Goodin 1992 does above), Hammond argues that sustainability is a process – indeed, it is dependent on transformability, as society must constantly adapt to sustain itself. Reflexivity and deliberation are essential to the process of sustainability, which 'necessitates critical contestation of otherwise ideological or power-based influences on political decision-making, such that it is inclusive, critical discourse in a diverse public sphere that challenges entrenched views and structures' (Hammond & Ward, 2019, p. 5).

What each of these interpretations of the relationship between democracy, sustainability and environmentalism converge on is the need for citizen engagement and collective action on environmental issues. Sustainable prosperity requires democracy. This is a key starting point for this research. Yet, despite an urgent need for meaningful democracy and collective action, we have witnessed a drastic hollowing out and devaluing of democracy in the UK over the past few decades. Neoliberalism has placed significant limitations on democracy in terms

of depoliticising policy (e.g. privatisation), as well as the proliferation of a ‘neoliberal rationality’ (Brown, 2015). In this context, barriers to engagement are compounded (Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995); a sense of commonality or a ‘common good’ is undermined (Brown, 2019); and pluralism or ‘a belief in alternatives’ is deemed naïve (Davies, 2017; Levitas, 2013). The detrimental impacts of neoliberalism on democracy is explored in chapter 2 of this thesis, along with an account of how democratic spaces may offer a means of overcoming these negative impacts.

1.2 Democracy and the arts

Hammond and Ward (2019), amongst others (eg. Nussbaum, 2013), suggest that the arts may have a key role to play in creating the right conditions for a deliberative culture. Specifically, they argue that the arts offer unique opportunities for empathetic listening and critical contestation, “which in turn are key to rendering deliberation deep and reflective enough to play a role in sustainability” (Hammond & Ward, 2019, p. 11). They argue for the educative role the arts plays for specific issues related to sustainability – connecting audiences with both the factual and emotional aspects of environmental and social issues. In addition, they note the ways in which the arts contribute to key social and political capacities such as imagination (as crucial to future building and political change) and empathy (as crucial for building a collective).

Hammond and Ward’s work adds to a growing body of literature with the field of Politics and Political Theory, on the role of the arts in democratic engagement and democratic processes (Chou, Gagnon, & Pruitt, 2015; Mattern & Love, 2013; Ryan & Flinders, 2018). However, it should be noted that much of this literature often presents a highly instrumental view of the arts as a tool for democratic engagement, and, at times, risks hyperbolic interpretations of the potential of the arts. The historic and contemporary role of the arts in democracy has also been well rehearsed within other disciplines such as Theatre Studies, Cultural Policy and Media & Communications (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008; Bishop, 2012; Gross & Wilson, 2018; Prentki & Preston, 2009). Significantly, the literature from Politics and Political Theory, on the one hand, and the literature from Theatre Studies, industry publications and Media & Communications, on the other, rarely speak to

one another – despite a broadly shared focus on the civic role of the arts.

This thesis aims to contribute to both these fields of study with impact across disciplinary boundaries. As a researcher, I approach this research from the perspective of Political Theory –with a particular interest in democratic engagement. I also have a background (and ongoing practice) as a theatre maker working within the field of participatory theatre, and am engaged with various industry-wide networks addressing the potential social and civic role of the arts. It was this dual perspective that alerted me to the possible overlaps between citizen engagement in democratic processes and audience engagement in theatrical experiences. This positionality has afforded me unique access in my fieldwork, but also raises questions of potential biases. There is a concern that, as a theatre maker, I may have a vested interest in the democratic value of participatory theatre. As I shall detail in chapters 4 and 9, a motivation for undertaking this research has been to reflect upon and understand my practice as a theatre maker. A key part of this is to better understand this mediums' limitations, as well as the opportunities it may afford.

It is important to acknowledge that whilst there is clearly cause to explore the overlaps between theatre and democracy, this study is undertaken with an awareness of the probable limitations to this approach. A conflict considered throughout this thesis is between the inclusivity necessary for democracy and the barriers to engagement present within the arts sector. It is well documented that "participation in cultural activities outside the home remains a core activity for only a small minority of people, with a large penumbra of very occasional attendees and around a quarter of the population taking no part at all" (Oakley, Ball, et al., 2018, p. 5). Furthermore, participation in arts activities are unevenly distributed across social class "those who lived in the most deprived areas were the least likely group to have engaged with the arts" (Pyle, 2019). There is also uneven distribution according to age, geography and race (Neelands et al., 2015). The issue of broadening and diversifying engagement is a major concern within

the publicly funded arts sector[2]. In this thesis, inclusivity within the arts is an issue with regards to the potential democratic role of the arts. As I shall argue in chapter 2, inclusivity is a crucial component of democracy and any discussion of the arts as a democratic space must acknowledge this.

Failures of inclusivity within the arts mirror the issue of engagement and inclusivity within political participation – which is similarly unevenly distributed and poorly attended (Hansard Society, 2019). Indeed, the barriers of engagement for both politics and the arts run parallel (Cunningham, 2014). Henry Brady, Sidney Verba and Kay Lehman Scholzman (1995) argue that there are three broad categories which can be used to explain a lack of political engagement: "They cannot" (related to issues of resources, for example, time or money); "They don't want to" (related to interest, and potentially cultural/social barriers); and "Nobody asked" (related to limited efforts to reach out beyond engaged citizens) (p. 271)[3].

Interestingly, this maps very closely onto survey responses gathered by the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) explaining lack of engagement – with the two most popular being "I'm not interested" and "I don't have time" (Pyle, 2019). Furthermore, potential answers related to how to engage potential participants overlap significantly between arts and politics. Both focus on facilitating more meaningful and deeper forms of participation to generate a sense of agency and ownership amongst those traditionally less likely to engage (Arnstein, 1969; Jancovich, 2017; Matarasso, 2019; Norris, 2002; Pateman, 2012). It is no coincidence that the arts sector has begun to use Sherry Arnstein's Ladder of Participation (1969), which offers a tiered framework of political engagement with tokenism at the bottom and citizen control at the top (Bishop, 2011).

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[2] There can be a tendency here to assume that more people *should* be engaging with the arts. This risks ignoring the forms of 'everyday culture' which people already engage with, and can implicitly reinforce outdated notions of high and low culture (Jancovich, 2017; Miles & Gibson, 2017). As I shall argue in later chapters, participation in the arts becomes an issue in this thesis because I am exploring the role of the arts as a democratic space, and democracy requires diversity of perspective and inclusivity.

[3] It is important to note that these are broad categories and seek to organise self-reported barriers to engagement, rather than assess the underlying socio-political factors which contribute to these barriers.

Overall, in undertaking this study, it is important to consider the probable limitations to the role of the arts (and specifically theatre) within democratic engagement. The issue of inclusivity, with particular attention to the two case studies explored in this thesis, is addressed throughout this research and the implications of this limitation on this research are offered in chapter 8 and 9.

1.3 Chapter summary

In chapter 2 of this thesis I offer a full rationale for this research in relation to the threats to democracy posed by neoliberalism. This chapter also offers a review of the literature, both historical and contemporary, pertaining to the concept of democratic spaces – namely from the fields of Politics, Political Theory and Education. I give special attention to deliberative democracy, before introducing my own theoretical framework for the concept of a useful democratic space, which outlines five key elements: (1) inclusivity, (2) listening and exchange, (3) discourse on the common good, (4) imagination and a belief in alternatives, and (5) political efficacy. This framework is returned to throughout the thesis, particularly in my analysis of two empirical case studies explored in chapters 5 to 8.

Chapter 3 focuses on the history and literature surrounding the concept of participatory theatre. The term's history is closely related to questions of participatory politics, namely the 'participatory turn' in the 1960s. Drawing together these threads is crucial in articulating the potential role of participatory theatre in democracy. However, the relationship between democracy and theatre also has a problematic history, which needs to be acknowledged. In chapter 3 I shall address the patriarchal and oppressive role theatre has played (and still plays), as well as the issues of instrumentalisation of the arts – which is a key consideration in a study of this kind, and all too often overlooked by social scientists.

Having laid these theoretical foundations, chapter 4 will address the methodology used in this thesis, not only in terms of my empirical data collection and analysis, but also the research approach which underpins the study as a whole, as well as the normative assumptions and ethics at play within this research project. In this

chapter I also fully introduce my two case studies, *Cathy* by Ali Taylor and Cardboard Citizens (an example of Forum and Legislative Theatre[4]) and *We Know Not What We May Be* by METIS (a performance installation piece). This chapter will also detail my rationale for empirically addressing my research questions through in-depth case studies and my choice of these two productions.

In this thesis *Cathy* is the focus of two chapters (5 and 6), whilst *We Know Not* is only the focus of one (Chapter 7). This is not reflective of different levels of significance, rather the differing histories of these two productions. *Cathy* is an example of Legislative and Forum Theatre, a well-developed genre of theatre dating back to the 1970s and practiced globally. This established genre, and its significance to this research, requires additional space. *We Know Not* does not sit within an equivalent historical and artistic context. Furthermore, by the time the empirical research was conducted (2018-2019) *Cathy* was touring nationally for a second time, whilst *We Know Not* had a single four day run in London. Therefore, there was also more data and background to draw on for *Cathy.*

Chapter 5 of this thesis begins the empirical analysis. It focuses on the crucial role of emotions and mood within *Cathy* by Cardboard Citizens, and offers insights into how this may impact upon its potential as a democratic space. The key arguments presented in this chapter relate to the lasting nature of the emotional impact of the piece on audiences, and the ways in which emotion and mood motivate political discourse and a sense of collectivity in the space. This chapter also articulates the potentially problematic relationship *Cathy* has with the issue of blame, as well as issues of inclusivity in terms of including diverse political perspectives.

Chapter 6 continues my focus on *Cathy* – addressing the role of symbolism and expertise in this production and how this relates to the key elements of a democratic space. In this chapter I argue that Cardboard Citizens disrupt traditional approaches to expertise within democratic spaces in their production of *Cathy.* This production also offers an innovative form of prefigurative politics through the symbolic gesture of audience interventions (as a 'rehearsal for the revolution' (Boal, 1979)) and performing alternative realities. This

[4] Definitions and background on these terms are offered in chapter 3.

chapter also addresses the potential limitations, and even risks, of symbolism as purely performative, in that it can undermine more tangible policy impact.

In chapter 7, I turn my attention to my second in-depth case study, *We Know Not What We May Be* by METIS. The focus of this chapter is the ways in which METIS builds liminality and a sense of the collective through this production. In this chapter I will draw on Victor Turner's understanding of liminality to argue that *We Know Not's* liminal quality is important to the creation of a democratic space in terms of building a sense of collectivity, as well as listening, imagination and a belief in alternatives. I also portray the potential limitations to this approach – primarily in terms of inclusivity, as a number of audience members felt alienated and unable to engage due to the same elements which contributed to the liminality of the space.

Chapter 8 offers a summary of the key empirical findings of this research as well as drawing out the opportunities and limitations of participatory theatre as democratic space. In this chapter I return to the key themes arising from my empirical research including, emotion, alternative forms of expression, playfulness, symbolism and liminality. In this chapter I also draw out the two major limitations arising from this approach to democratic space: inclusivity and political efficacy.

Finally, chapter 9 brings together this empirical work and the theoretical investigations of earlier chapters to summarise the key arguments and offer an overarching conclusion. I argue that, although neither case study can be defined as a useful democratic space (due to broad and embedded systemic issues), there are significant opportunities to be learned from and taken forwards in terms of participatory theatre as an approach to democratic space. This lays the groundwork for two proposed 'next steps' for this research, which aim to address some of the key limitations. Both of these proposals return to the starting point of this research, namely, the relationship between sustainability and democracy, and, more specifically, the role participatory theatre may play in building the democratic spaces needed for a sustainably prosperous society.

Chapter 2: The neoliberal threat to democracy and a framework for useful democratic space

In this chapter I will articulate the context and importance of this thesis; situating its position within the literature and laying out the problem which this project seeks to address. This is an interdisciplinary project, and in this chapter I will primarily be drawing on thinkers and literature from the field of democratic theory, from the overlapping displinary perspectives of Political Theory, Education and Philosophy.

This chapter explores the ways in which democracy in the UK is undermined and threatened by neoliberal rationality and neoliberal policy, and the role democratic spaces can play in overcoming these threats. It begins with a brief exploration of three key democratic theorists (Hannah Arendt, Paulo Freire and Joseph Schumpeter), each of whom offer a different version of democracy and democratic values. I will be referring back to these thinkers throughout this thesis. Following a brief analysis of Schumpeter's problematic view of democracy, I begin to unpack the limitations to democracy presented by neoliberal rationality and neoliberal policy. This chapter then turns to the potential of deliberative democracy as an antidote to these threats. However, deliberative democracy has become a loaded term, with significant critique from the feminist perspective in relation to its emphasis on rationality and dismissal of the role of emotions within political discourse. These critiques become particularly pertinent when linking democratic theory with the arts, as this thesis seeks to do. In light of this, I will be using the term 'democratic space' throughout this thesis, and in the final section of this chapter, I will define this term and outline an original framework for the constitution of a useful democratic space. Drawing on classic and contemporary literature from the field of democratic theory I argue that a useful democratic space must cultivate five key elements: inclusivity, listening and exchange, a focus on the common good, imagination and a belief in alternatives, and political efficacy. In later chapters, this framework serves to breakdown and better understand the ways in which participatory theatre can contribute to democratic activity.

2.1 On democracy

As is well documented in almost every major text on democracy, the origins of democracy date back to the ancient Athenians – roughly 500 BCE. What makes this history particularly relevant to this project is that this is also the time and location for the origins of the Western canon of theatre – with Euripides, Sophocles and their peers. The theatre was an important political space in ancient Greece – the comedies and tragedies of the time often satirizing, critiquing and commenting upon current affairs and political personalities (Nussbaum, 2013; Wilson, 2018). It reinforces the relevance and importance of focussing on the contemporary relationship between theatre and democracy to note that this relationship goes back to the origins of both (in terms of the Western canon).

To begin this chapter I explore three key political theorists whose work offers significant insights into the underpinning principles of democracy, which, in turn, have informed the construction of my democratic spaces framework. The first two, Hannah Arendt and Paulo Freire, offer important insights related to pluralism, collectivity, deliberation and equality. Alongside their significant contributions to democratic theory, both these authors also wrote on, or offered significant inspiration for, the participatory theatre practice explored in subsequent chapters. The third, Joseph Schumpeter, is explored in this chapter to deepen my analysis of the neoliberal threat to democracy. Whilst his work pre-dates the neoliberal turn, his democratic theory in many ways foreshadows the practice of democracy under neoliberalism.

In this thesis, Hannah Arendt's work is crucial – particularly in relation to conceptions of the common good, the importance of listening and exchange within political discourse, and the significance of inclusivity to democracy. Hannah Arendt's theory of democracy rests on her belief in collectivity and the importance of a common, public realm: "men, not man, live on earth and inhabit the world" (Arendt, [1959] 2019, p. 8). To live is to be amongst others: we are plural and this plurality is the fundamental basis of political life. Her work is motivated by an opposition to totalitarianism – in the wake of Nazism – and, as such, she rejects

notions of the ‘general will[5]’, or even the pursuit of public consensus, in favour of political plurality. Plurality is a cornerstone of Arendt’s political philosophy, as well as her phenomenlogical work. In terms of democratic theory, Arendt’s work seeks “to enable men to live together without stunting human plurality and repressing one another's capacity for action and thought” (Canovan, 1983, p. 293). For Arendt, political discourse depends upon disagreement and the exchange of alternative perspectives. Within her concept of the ‘public realm’, where political discourse occurs, Arendt “explores notions of opinion, judgement, and sheer contingent political compromise that are involved in reaching solutions appropriate to the plural condition of men” (Canovan, 1983, p. 295). Within the public realm disagreement and the inclusion of alternative perspectives is crucial, however, there is still a consensus amongst participants that the purpose of the space is the pursuit of common interests. For Arendt, the public interest is quite distinct from private interests, and the purpose of the public realm is not to aggregate private interests. Rather, the public realm is concerned with the common world, which is “what we enter when we are born and what we leave behind when we die” (Arendt, [1959] 2019, p. 55). She compares the public sphere ‘a table being the object in-between a group sat at it: it relates and separates them at the same time’ (ibid. p. 52). Crucially, for Arendt, the public realm is “what we have in common not only with those who live with us, but also with those who were here before and with those who will come after us.” (ibid.) In other words, the public sphere is separate from each individual – it transcends the individual, but it is also what connects us together as a collective. To seek out and question the interests of the public world, shared by all citizens, is the purpose of discourse within the public sphere. We can only do this by going beyond our private interest, as “what constitutes the authentic political attitude is the capacity and willingness to give reasons in public, to entertain others' point of view, to transform the dictates of self-interest into a common public goal” (Benhabib, 1997, p. 6).

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[5] The ‘general will’ is a concept created by Rousseau and has had significant influence within notions of the common good and collective decision-making. Rousseau is careful to state that it is not the “will of all”- which is the aggregate of all citizen’s private interests. Rather, the general will “always looks to the common interest” (Rousseau, [1762] 2004), as an ‘attempt to overcome the immorality and degradation of an individualistic society, based on a multiplicity of particular wills’ (Boucher, 2009, p. 271).

One of the case studies explored in later chapters, *Cathy* by Cardboard Citizens, sits within the genre of 'Theatre of the Oppressed' – I shall go on to investigate this genre in more detail in chapter 3. As the name suggests, it borrows heavily from Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* ([1968] 1996). His work on emancipation and dialogue is also a key in terms of understanding the neoliberal threat to democracy and creating useful democratic spaces.

Freire argued that the emancipation of both the oppressed and the oppressor must initially come from the oppressed. For emancipation to take place, we must first believe in the possibility of alternatives, and then also envision practical routes toward those alternatives. As I shall argue later in this chapter, this belief in alternatives is a crucial aspect of democracy.

> …in order for the oppressed to be able to wage the struggle for their liberation, they must perceive the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they can transform. (Freire [1970] 2018, p. 31).

The act of dialogue is of particular political significance for Freire as it is through communication that we 'name the world'. Through language and communication comes our understanding of the world around us, which in turn allows us to both reflect on the world, believe in change and to make change. Power imbalances and oppressions are contained within our language, both in terms of who is allowed to speak (and 'name the world') and the hierarchies which are contained within the structure of language itself. "…the word is more than just an instrument to make dialogue possible… to speak a true word is to transform the world" (Freire, [1968] 1996, p. 70). Freire's 'true words' contain both reflection (acknowledgement of how we currently perceive the world) and action (a commitment to transformation). In containing both reflection and action in his understanding of 'true words', Freire acknowledges our political and social contexts as constantly changing: there is not an end goal or a fixed external way the world is, the process of naming the world is always ongoing.

Freire argues that dialogue and exchange are also essential components of overcoming oppressions as dialogue, and learning, are dependent on broadly balanced power relationships: "this dialogue cannot be reduced to the act of one

person's "depositing" ideas in another, nor can it become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants (Freire, [1968] 1996). He challenges the "banking" approach to education: an approach which understands students as "receptacles to be filled by the teacher" (Freire, [1968] 1996, p. 53). Knowledge creation between learner and teacher is a collaborative and dialogical process, "imbued with profound trust in people and their creative power" (p.56). This approach to education is based on the understanding outlined above that reality is not fixed and that we all have a role in changing it. According to the "banking" approach, the role of education is to ensure students adapt to the world as it is, ("the educated individual is the adapted person" p.57). Freire's radical pedagogy would have us reimagine the world for ourselves.

Fundamentally, both Freire and Arendt argue that for democracy to operate – that is for the ideal of 'rule by the people' to be fulfilled – citizens must play an active role in reflective, pluralistic and efficacious political discourse. It is through this participation that citizens shape the world they live in.

By contrast, Joseph Schumpeter rejected the 'classical doctrine of democracy', by which he means a kind of representative democracy. He defines this doctrine as an "institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions, which realizes the common good by making the people decide issues through the election of individuals who are to carry out its will" (Schumpeter, [1942] 1976, p. 250). His first criticism of this doctrine is the implausibility of the 'common good'. He argued that even with perfect information, compromise and deliberation, the common good was unachievable "because ultimate values—our conceptions of what life and what society should be—are beyond the range of mere logic" ([1942] 1976, p. 251)[6]. Interestingly, this thesis emerged at a similar time to Arendt's work, and was also in response to the rise of totalitarianism in Europe and two world wars. Like Arendt, Schumpeter strongly valued pluralism within politics. However, rather than exploring pluralism through discourse, or direct participation in democracy, he offered an individualised approach to democracy, which favoured preference aggregation.

[6] This foreshadows future feminist critiques of deliberative democracy in terms of its overemphasis of the role of rationality (touched upon later in this chapter).

Schumpeter criticises the ‘classical doctrine of democracy’ for its naïve approach to political decision making. Schumpeter argued that “for different individuals and groups, the common good is bound to mean different things” ([1942] 1976, p. 226). It should be noted that this ‘classical doctrine of democracy’, makes no real reference to any democratic theorists apart from ambiguous references to the ‘utilitarians’ who were not known for this version of democracy – indeed, J.S. Mill’s work on democracy may be better associated with Schumpeter’s own ‘elitist model’, outlined below (Faber, 2011, p. 300). Therefore, his critique, and the construction of his own version of democracy based on this critique – appears fallacious. As we have seen, Arendt may well agree with Schumpeter’s above statement regarding the many meanings of ‘common good’, however, according to Schumpeter’s defintion, she would likely be counted among the naïve theorists of the ‘classical doctrine’.

His criticism of the common good (which seems to be a simplified version of Rousseau’s ‘general will’) is more convincing – it is of course challenging (and sometimes impossible) to agree upon a conception of the common good. However, it does not follow that we should therefore abandon it as a project. “It is not a failure of the theory, but a reflection of the fallibility of men” (Faber, 2011, p. 302). Schumpeter’s denial of the common good is too quick: that it presents a significant challenge, and that many will disagree, does not necessarily mean it should be abandoned. Indeed, as I shall argue later in this chapter and throughout the thesis, disagreement within democratic spaces is important, and the process of exchanging political ideas, perspectives and opinions has significant value, regardless of whether a consensus is reached.

Schumpeter’s answer to this ‘classical doctrine’ is his ‘elitist model of democracy’, which emphasises the competitive elements of democracy and rule by experts[7]. In this model of democracy there are “institutional arrangements for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote” ([1942] 1976, p. 269). Schumpeter uses

[7] It is interesting to note the clear overlaps of Schumpeter’s version of democracy with the neoliberal approach to democratic politics and then note that a cornerstone of the recent populist response to neoliberalism is a denial of ‘experts’ and ‘elites’ (Müller, 2017). This is touched upon again in chapter 6 in relation to Cardboard Citizens’ production of *Cathy*.

the analogy of the market throughout his articulation of this version of democracy, in which the citizen become a consumer, choosing between competing brands. The role of the citizen in this conception of democracy is limited to voting periodically. The project of governance and political decision making is then left to these elected officials. These officials are not seen as representatives of the people, rather it is accepted and understood that their decision making will be according to their own judgement
– the electorate has elected them as governers, not as representatives of their interests. Political ideology, or any notion of the common good, is purely a persuasive technique used to attract votes within this understanding of democracy. For example, Schumpeter argues,

> …all parties will, of course, at any given time, provide themselves with a stock of principles or planks, and these principles or planks may be as characteristic of the party that adopts them and as important for its success as the brands of goods a department store sells are characteristic of it and important for its success…A party is a group whose members propose to act in concert in the competitive struggle for political power. (p. 283)

Accordingly, there is no real ideological difference between say, the Conservative Party and the Labour Party, only differing approaches to attracting votes. With a Schumpeterian approach to democracy, the unifying component of a political party is that together they are more likely to attract enough votes to gain power.

This conception of democracy foreshadows our contemporary neoliberal approach to politics – indeed former President Barak Obama has been offered as an example of a Schumpeterian politician in his emphasis on technocracy and expert advice in policy-making (Faber, 2011, p. 297). Wendy Brown's (2015) critique of a neoliberal approach to democracy offers another criticism of Schumpeter's democratic method. She argues that the emphasis on competition, rather than cooperation, and the commodification of voting (as Schumpeter does when he equates it with buying a service according to your personal self-interest), undermines the *collective* value of democracy. For many democratic theorists (including Arendt and Freire) the value of democracy, as opposed to say, oligarchy, is that it is the only "form of association under which each individual, *while uniting*

with the others, obeys no one but themself and remains free" (Brown, 2015, p. 60). Self-governance and autonomy are crucial components of freedom. In limiting the democratic act to a periodic and commodified vote, Schumpeter is limiting the freedom and collectivism which underpin the democratic value of self-governance in the first place.

I would argue that there are significant overlaps in Schumpeter's 'elitist model', and a neoliberal approach to democracy, and that this approach severely limits the practice of democracy. I shall now turn my attention to these limitations. In the second half of this chapter I will address some ways in which these limits may be overcome and, in so doing, situate the original contribution this thesis hopes to make to the field of democratic theory.

2.2 Neoliberal policy and neoliberal rationality

Neoliberalism is an 'essentially contested concept' (Gallie, 1956); while there are certain common traits within its usage, the edges of the concept are ill-defined and include social, political and economic elements. A commonly accepted definition comes from David Harvey (2005):

> Neoliberalism is, in the first instance, a theory of political economic practices… characterised by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices… But beyond these tasks the state should not venture. (p.2)

The term is most often used by critics of neoliberalism, rather than by its proponents, and describes a wide variety of policies, practices and ideas. O'Neill and Weller (2016) claim that definitions of the term have become "so broad, so fluid and so multifaceted that the word may have become an obstacle to quality academic argument" (p.84). To avoid this charge one must be very careful and precise with defining the term. To this end, I will now outline my usage of this term, its policy implications and the notion of a neoliberal rationality – linking back to its impact upon democracy and its role within this thesis.

In the post-war period, the Mont Pelerin Society[8] sought to reinvent a liberalism which challenged the collectivist doctrines, like the growing welfare system, which were ascendant during this time (Nik-Khan & Van Horn, 2016, p. 28). Neoliberal thinking gained mainstream political significance and credibility in the 1970s when one of its most prominent thinkers, Friedrich von Hayek won the Sveridges Riksbank Prize (sometimes referred to as the 'Nobel Prize for Economics') in 1974, followed by Milton Friedman in 1976. These successes garnered publicity and conferred political legitimacy for neoliberal ideas.

Hayek argued that "the guiding principle in any attempt to create a world of free men must be this: a policy of freedom for the individual is the only truly progressive policy" (Hayek, [1944] 2001, p. 70). This concept of individual freedom is a key element of neoliberalism. In a truly neoliberal state, the individual has freedom to choose how they live: "if he wants to change his job or the place where he lives, if he wants to profess certain views or spend his leisure in a particular way, he faces no absolute impediments" (ibid. p. 41). Within neoliberalism "individual freedoms are guaranteed by freedom of the market and of trade" (Harvey, 2005, p. 7). It is freedom from state intervention, and the primary recipients of this freedom are the market and those with resources.

> …the system of private property is the most important guarantee of freedom. It is only because the control of the means of production is divided among many people acting independently that we as individuals can decide what to do with ourselves. (Hayek, [1944] 2001, p. 41)

Critics of this approach to economics and governance have argued that this neoliberal understanding of freedom is very limited and, at times, contraditory (Brown, 2015; Davies, 2014; Fenton, 2018a). There is the freedom to choose what we buy (*if* we can afford to), where we live (*if* we can afford to move) and what our job is (*if* we can pay for appropriate training and education). However, "while individuals are supposedly free to choose, they are not supposed to choose to

[8] In 1947 Friedrich Hayek invited a number of economists, historians and philosophers to discuss classical liberalism, the role of the state and the dangers of socialism. The participants included Milton Freidman, Karl Popper and Ludwig von Mises, all of whom have been key players in the proliferation of neoliberalism globally. The group named themselves the Mont Perelin Society after the location of their first meeting.

construct strong collective institutions" (Harvey, 2005, p. 69). Freedom to strike, form trade unions and protest for better working or living conditions are demonised, and sometimes actively policed and repressed in neoliberal states, with the justification that these actions impede upon the freedom of the market. Yet these are the very acts which enrich democratic engagement and, through which, citizens can enact forms of self-governance. For example, via trade unions citizens gain the ability to affect their own working conditions; through protests and strikes citizens voice dissent and aim to influence policy. In almost direct opposition to its own emphasis on minimal state intervention, the neoliberal state is expected to intervene to prevent industrial action which may harm the market, yet will not intervene when industry limits the freedom of workers.

There are some key traits which characterise neoliberal policy, which are rooted in this conception of freedom. Firstly, its ultimate goal of total market freedom would remove or minimise all attempts at redistribution of wealth (through taxation and social security). These are seen as a hindrance to the market, which, if free enough, neoliberals suppose can deliver prosperity for all. This view is based on an assumption of a level playing field, and broadly ignores potential advantages of wealth, race, gender and class. This assumption is damaging, as to ignore these inequalities is to reinforce them, and results in an unequal distribution of freedom of choice (Freire, [1968] 1996). Evidence has shown that the idea that the market can deliver prosperity for all without any attempts at levelling the playing field (through what is often dubbed 'trickle down economics') does not work. "Since the 'Reagan Revolution' the divide in market incomes increased to unprecedented levels" (Stiglitz, 2012, p. 6). Those Western countries which have embraced neoliberal thinking most enthusiastically (namely, the USA and the UK), have the most extreme levels of inequality and the poorest records of social mobility. In Wilkinson & Pickett's (2010) extensive quantitative research into inequality rates and its effects, they found amongst developed economies the USA, Singapore, Portugal and the UK had the largest income inequality in which 'the richest 20% get about nine times as much as the poorest 20%' (p. 15)[9]. Jacobs & Myers (2014),

[9] This divide has only increased in the 10 years since *The Spirit Level* (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010) was published.

and others (Harvey, 2005; Stiglitz, 2012) have argued that this rise in income inequality is directly related with the implementation of neoliberal policies such as privatisation and disempowering trade unions (beginning with the Reagan & Thatcher administrations, and then further by subsequent administrations in the USA & UK).

"There cannot be real political equality without some measure of economic equality" (de Tocqueville, [1835] 2002). Democracy depends on an equity of political influence: that each citizen has an equal vote and are equal before the law. This is a cornerstone of democracy – consitent across numerous approaches to, and theories of, democracy (Locke, [1688] 2004; Rawls, 1993; Rousseau, [1762] 2004). In theoretical democratic terms, our economic status should hold no sway in our status as citizens, and in the power our vote holds. However, high levels of economic inequality have been shown to have an impact on political equality, and those at the top of the distribution 'often enjoy inordinate power and are able to not only limit redistribution, but shape the rules of the game' (Stiglitz, 2012). Through political contributions, corporate lawsuits and lobbying those with the most resources hold disproportionate sway in political decision-making.

Income inequality can also undermine trust in political systems. Statistically, countries with higher income inequality are less likely to trust one another, or their politicians (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2010, p. 52). Research from Peter Hall suggests that we are increasingly less likely to trust our political representatives, with an increasing belief that 'politicians want votes, not opinions' (2002, p. 51).

This depletion of trust in the political system has a negative effect on political engagement and *who* engages. Turnout in general elections in the UK dropped by more than a fifth between 1992 to 2005 – although there has been a steady, although gradual, rise since then (Uberoi, 2019). Furthermore, personal characteristics (like age, class or race) are key indicators of political engagement: a recent IPPR report (2013) showed 'just 44% of 18-24 year olds voted in the 2010 general election, compared with 76% of over 65s.' Social class is another major indicator according to same report and in 2010 'individuals in the highest income group were 43% more likely to vote than those from the lowest.' Whilst this discrepancy between the old and young, rich and poor, is not unique to the UK, the

UK's unequal voting demographics are some of the widest in Europe (Curtis, 2017). Various political theorists have linked this political disengagement to neoliberalism (Brown, 2015; Hay, 2007) – not only due to income inequality erroding trust, but also due to processes of depoliticisation and the neoliberal rationality, which I shall outline below.

In his book, *Why We Hate Politics,* Colin Hay (2007) outlines the processes of politicisation and depoliticisation. These concepts refer to the process of ideas, issues or services moving between the governmental sphere, the public sphere, the private sphere and the domestic sphere. Issues may become depoliticised when they move from the sphere of formal government to the public sphere, or the public sphere to private sphere. For example, increasingly the management of public housing is outsourced to private companies – this moves the accountability for their maintenance from the public to the private sphere, despite the housing itself still being owned by local councils. "In this process, the public accountability relations are reformed from democratic accountability with local government to accountability relations based on a non-governmental service organization" (Smyth, 2017, p. 213).

Depoliticisation is key element of neoliberal policy as it generally leads to more autonomy for the market and less governmental control. The major fall out of widespread depoliticisation, as we have seen since the Reagan/Thatcher era, is a hollowing out of democratic control and systems of accountability. "This was not a disavowal of responsibility for policy, but a rejection of the very need for policy, and hence public deliberation in the first place" (Hay, 2007, p. 83). Taking responsibility and policy control from elected bodies and placing them within the market also means taking away the capacity for decision making from the electorate. This undermines democratic processes of accountability and self-governance within public services – e.g. within housing, education, transport and healthcare. "An emphasis on outsourcing has detached these services from democracy, depoliticising decisions about public welfare and the public good." (ibid.)

In this thesis I am concerned with democratic participation and the ways in which citizens engage with processes of governance and collectivity. As with Arendt and

Freire (and many other democratic theorists), I believe that democracy depends upon the active and meaningful participation of citizens. Therefore, understanding current limitations on these democratic processes is crucial. The paragraphs above offer some indication of how neoliberal policy has undermined democracy in the UK, I will now turn my attention to neoliberal rationality, before outlining the role deliberative democracy and democratic spaces may play in overcoming these limitations.

Teasing apart the conceptual boundaries of neoliberal policy and neoliberal rationality is a complex task: their origins and socio-political implications are deeply interconnected. Neoliberal rationality, as distinct from policy, focuses on elements of neoliberalism which are more subtle, yet incipit and far-reaching: shifts in language, shifts in the way we view ourselves in relation to others and our role as citizens. The neoliberal rationality depends on 'rational choice theory', i.e. the notion that rational behaviour is competitive and focused on utility maximization for the individual. It is a useful concept in helping to understand neoliberalism's restructuring of the social (Brown, 2016; Foucault, 2008). Broadly speaking the concept refers to the internal rationalisation of market logics across the whole of social life (including state institutions), or "…the commodification of all human needs and desires into profitable enterprise" (Fenton, 2018a, p. 10). Neoliberal rationality focuses on the economization implied in rational choice theory's understanding of human behaviour and "configures human beings exhaustively as market actors, always, only, and everywhere as *homo oeconomicus.*" (Brown, 2015, p. 31, emphasis in original). This does not only pertain to monetary considerations, but also spheres of life ordinarily thought of as outside economics. This is what makes neoliberal rationality distinctive from other forms of liberal or classical thought (which also often depend upon rational choice theory). Thinkers ranging from Karl Marx to Adam Smith had notions of the *homo oeconomicus,* however, according to Wendy Brown (2015) neoliberalism has taken this notion further in that "we are everywhere *homo oeconomicus* and only *homo oeconomicus*" (p.33). There is no distinction between political or ethical life and economic life.

Neoliberal rationality restructures the values of society to become seen as 'the given', 'crowding out other rationalities, other ways of organising society' (Couldry, 2010, p. 12). Neoliberalism is not an ideology, but common sense: "what

is called Thatcherism in this country is much older than Thatcher, it is *common sense*, economics, and it works" (Thatcher, 1988, emphasis added). The state and political institutions are presented as inefficient, ineffective and obstructive to freedom, and arguments for the transference of power from government to the market is no longer a political act, but a pragmatic decision in order to improve the efficiency of the economy and the flourishing of society. It denies the practicality or viability of any real alternative. Indeed, another nickname for Thatcher was TINA, an acronym for 'There Is No Alternative'. Although this was an approach initially adopted by Thatcher in the UK, it was expanded by Blair: "Of all Thatcher's maxims that he adopted, 'there is no alternative' was the most ubiquitous. Thatcher had described socialism as an idea tested to destruction and Blair agreed" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 168). New Labour's[10] rhetoric was focussed on 'taking the politics out of it' – in which 'politics' had become by-word for inefficiency, self- serving tendacies and/or corruption (Flinders, 2012). This pragmatic approach to policy was underpinned with value measurement and private-public partnerships: returns on social investments, measuring impacts, as well as the unquestioned notion that a thriving society was one with high GDP growth. Social policies, such as higher levels of education or health spending were justified in these terms – social benefits were underpinned with economic ones (Hesmondhalgh, Oakley, Lee, & Nisbett, 2015, p. 26). This has also had significant (and lasting) ramifications for the funding structures within the arts sector – which I shall return to in chapter 3. Armed with facts and figures, the belief was that considerations like educational reform, funding for the arts or environmental policy could be determined pragmatically, free from political ideology. The state could be run like a firm – measured on efficiency and output, and 'citizens' became 'citizen-consumers' (Needham, 2003).

The denial of alternatives also mirrors the work on *silencing* which I will be exploring in the second half of this chapter. To declare opposing views as irrational

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[10] A policy approach adopted by the Labour Party from the mid-1990s to 2008, under the leadership of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. It is commonly used to describe the move away from the traditional Socialist values of the party and the shift towards a more 'pragmatic' approach to politics and policy-making. This is somewhat summarised in Prime Minister Blair's speech in 1997, following a landslide victory: "This is not a mandate for dogma or for doctrine, or for a return to the past, but it was a mandate to get those things done in our country that desperately need doing for the future." (2nd May, 1997).

and impossible is arguably to *illocutionarily disable* the opposition: “Let them speak. Let them say whatever they like to whomever they like, but stop that speech from counting as an action” (Langton, 1993, p. 299). The action, in this instance is to enter into a reasonable and plausible political dialogue about the common good, or alternative political systems, and this action is denied if alternatives to neoliberalism are deemed impossible. Democracy requires a belief in alternative economic and social structures, as citizens must feel that they have a choice or a role to play in change. As Natalie Fenton argues, “when sections of the public no longer think that change is possible then liberal democracy as failed” (Fenton, 2018b, p. 33).

To focus on a consumer identity, rather than a notion of citizenship, undermines democracy. It assumes individualism and a singular interest in economic wellbeing, rather than social goals or interest in the common good. This assumption, coupled with a denial of alternatives, limits citizen’s ability and propensity to imagine the world otherwise. Within the neoliberal rationality alternatives are derided as idealistic, unrealistic and naïve and this undermines the idea of political change: if citizens believe they cannot change anything, there is little reason to engage with politics.

As aforementioned, neoliberalism depends upon an understanding of human nature as self- interested utility maximizers (Hay, 2007)[11]. According to the logic of rational choice theory, each citizen will always act in to maximize their own self-interest, and collective or common goods will always be exploited for personal gain. Therefore, society must be organized in such a way as to ensure our natural propensity for selfishness does the least harm. As we have seen, to achieve this, the state replaced ‘citizen’ with ‘consumer’, or ‘client’, and adopted numerous audit devices, rationalisations through the introduction of the ‘new public management’ and depoliticisation of state services to private provision (Mirrowski 2013; Hay 2008; Needham 2003). Part of this process involved redirecting public policy away from “what was essentially a communal focus to one which is more individualized, and from one which had at its heart the notion of public good to one which is

[11] It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully articulate the philosophical, biological and psychological issues with this theory. See (Hay, 2007; Jackson, 2017, pp. 131-138).

primarily concerned with promoting commercial success and market transaction" (Bell & Oakley, 2015, p. 7).

Jackson (2017) argues that this belief in individualism and self-serving decision-making has become so embedded within our social and economic systems that it has become a kind of self- fulfilling prophecy. Drawing on Robert Axelrod, Jackson argues that "…the balance of behaviours [competition and cooperation] depends on how a society is structured." (2017, p.137) Through years of neoliberalism our institutions and markets have "created an economy which privileges, and systematically encourages novelty and selfishness…over alturistic ones" (Jackson, 2017, p. 137). We have institutionalised a version of human nature which emphasises selfishness and competition, and undermines cooperation and alturism. This version of human nature serves the market well, but perhaps loses sight of whether the market exists to serve us or vice versa.

Overall, individualism undermines the possibility of a discourse focused on the common good, which depends on citizens viewing themselves as a part of a collective social body and to act with a motivation to improve society for all. This will be a recurring theme throughout this thesis. An emphasis on a collectivity and a focus on the common good is a key aspect of both the case studies explored in chapters 4-8.

2.3 Deliberative democracy

Whilst I ultimately reject the term deliberative democracy in favour of the term democratic space (for reasons explained below), the theoretical and normative foundations of these terms overlap substantially, and both have a role to play in overcoming the neoliberal limitations placed on democracy. The main authors of this field come from the discipline of Politics (eg. Cohen, 1989; Dryzek, 2014; Elster, 1998; Fishkin, 1991). A key definition of deliberative democracy comes from political theorist Jon Elster (1998):

> …collective decision-making with the participation of all who will be affected by the decision or their representatives which… includes decision making by means of arguments offered by and to participants who are committed to the values of rationality and impartiality. (p.8)

Deliberative theorists agree that “the political process involves more than self-interested competition governed by bargaining and aggregative mechanisms” (Bohman & Rehg, 1997, p.xiii) in a move away from Schumpeterian views of democracy. The Schumpeterian notion of the voter as ‘consumer’, which equates voting with buying and selling, is rejected through deliberative democracy. Rather, the subject of democratic deliberation is “the good of the public and matters of fundamental justice” (Bohman & Rehg, 1997, p. 93). The underlying premise of deliberative democracy is that it will be unlikely for citizens within the deliberative space to argue that a given solution should be chosen just because it is good for oneself. Benhabib explains this in relation to Arendt’s public realm:

> …the very procedure of articulating a view in public imposes a certain reflexivity on individual preferences and opinions. When presenting her point of view and position to others, an individual must support them by articulating 'good reasons' in a public context to her co-deliberators… Nobody can convince others in public of her point of view without being able to state why, what appears good, plausible, just and expedient to her, can also be considered so from the standpoint of all involved. (Benhabib, 1997)

The term is also closely linked to a Habermasian understanding of the public sphere, “comprising the press, media, civil associations, public spaces, social and political reformers, and of course cultural institutions… from an active ‘public culture’ emerged ‘rational’ debate, producing a political consensus that informed the State mechanisms of representation and governance” (Vickery, 2011, p. 226). The public discourse – within public spaces, the media and within formal political institutions, are all important aspects of a ‘deliberative culture’ (Dryzek, 2000; Hammond, 2019). This notion of a ‘deliberative culture’ is referred to again in chapter 9, in terms of investigating potential next steps for this research. However, in this thesis, I am focussed upon more specific sites of political discourse, rather than a broad view of the public sphere.

Another important factor of deliberative democracy, present in much of the literature, is the importance of listening and exchange amongst citizens. There is an underlying assumption within deliberative democracy that through discussion

and exchange, citizens may alter their political beliefs. As Gambetta notes, 'free speech means little if no-one is prepared to listen' (1998). Ideally deliberative democracy "provides informative and mutually respectful discussion in which people consider the issue on its merits" (Fishkin, 1991, p. 13). We may imagine John Rawls[12] ([1971] 1999) 'veil of ignorance'[13] as the ideal deliberative democratic space – one which rests on fairness and reasoned argument, and eradicates self-interest and emotional ideological attachments.

However, Gambetta (1998) argues "this can be hindered through social norms where emphasis is placed on having strong opinions from the outset and winning arguments. We are unlikely to listen to one another's arguments, much less be persuaded by them" (p.20). As such, deliberative democratic spaces are often dominated by a few confident voices, in which 'the weaker may simply acquiesce to the stronger' (p.21). Listening and exchange is a major theme within this thesis, and as I shall argue in later chapters, the ways in which these processes were facilitated within the participatory theatre projects explored in my empirical research offer important opportunities for learning for other democratic spaces.

Deliberative democracy's approach to political discourse as a primarily rational act can be exclusionary and miss potentially fruitful approaches to political communication (Young, 2000). It rests on the Kantian, and then Rawlsian, approach to political philosophy as: "the study of the conception and outcome of a suitably defined rational decision" (Rawls, [1971] 1999). Rawls, and many other thinkers within the field of political theory, have placed great emphasis on reason, and these theorists have historically failed to adequately address the role of emotion in political discourse. This has been further compounded in the more recent work on deliberative democracy and its emphasis on rational argument.

The critique of this approach primarily comes from feminist thinkers, with Susan Okin leading the way (1989). This is also taken up by Martha Nussbaum in her

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[12] John Rawls (1993, [1971] 1999) is a key theorist within deliberative democracy, although he never used the term directly within his own work.

[13] The 'veil of ignorance' is a hypothetical situation invented by Rawls in which a group of citizens, magically ignorant of their class, ideological biases, gender, race and other personal characteristics, discuss the common good. Within this hypothetical situation, citizens are "rational and mutually disinterested" (Rawls, [1971] 1999, Rawls argues that this ignorance, coupled with rational discussion, would necessarily lead to just and equitable social policy.

book *Political Emotions* (2013), in which she argues emotions are crucial to seeking a Rawlsian 'overlapping consensus'[14] and the principles of justice which underpin it. To establish such a consensus requires citizens to find overlapping values, principles and constitutional ideals – these are highly emotive subjects. Furthermore, Nussbaum argues, "if those principles are to be efficacious, the state must also encourage love and devotion to those ideals" (2013, p. 7). Significantly for this thesis, Nussbaum directly relates this to preserving the freedom of artists as those who express the emotional relationship to justice most clearly and strongly, referring to the arts as a source of political motivation, emotional expression and a normative articulation of political ideals. Nussbaum makes regular reference to Walt Whitman and Rabindranath Tagore in particular. She argues that these poets (amongst many other artists) can "prompt emotions that sustain and inspire the difficult pursuit of justice" (2013, p. 12).[15] The political implications of the emotional power of art is a major theme in this thesis, particularly in relation to *Cathy* by Cardboard Citizens, and will be explored in greater detail in chapters 3 and 5.

It is no coincidence that this critique of deliberative democracy primarily comes from the feminist perspective. Emotion has been, at best, ignored , and at worst, derided as harmful to the project of establishing a just society (Aristotle, [335–323 BCE] 1992; Kant, [1855] 2007; Plato, [375 BC] 2003; Rawls, [1971] 1999). Emotion is associated with femininity by many of these same philosophers, in opposition to the rational and civilised characteristics of masculinity. These arguments have also been used as a justification against the sufferage and civil rights of ethnic minorities. In the history of political philosophy, right up to Rawls (and in many instances, beyond), the 'rational thinker' is invariably assumed to be male and white[16]. This history is implicated and becomes present when talking

[14] In later works, Rawls' moved away from the 'veil of ignorance' to develop the theory of 'overlapping consensus' (also known as the 'constitutional consensus'). This idea acknowledges the potential differences in moral, religious and political beliefs amongst citizens within a pluralist, liberal democracy. However, Rawls argued that through reasoned discourse and reflection on the different moral and political ideas in society, we can establish an 'overlapping consensus' (Martin, 2009, p. 567) by which we can determine the key rights needed for citizens to enjoy the good life.

[15] Nussbaum also highlights the importance of humour & satire in this discourse – humour is important to punctate these heartfelt calls to justice. It encourages plurality, dissent and stops rhetoric from becoming pompous (2013).

[16] For some examples see Aristotle's *History of Animals* 1902*;* Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* 1960)

about the need for rational argument in deliberative democracy.

Aside from this problematic history, the hierarchical division of rationality and emotions has also been challenged within contemporary cognitive studies, which reveals a heavily intertwined relationship between emotion and rationality within decision making. Johnson- Laird and Oatley, for example, claim that "emotions help to specify which goals will be actively pursued, and which abandoned, or assigned to a subsidiary or dormant status" (1992, p. 208). Furthermore, political theorist Stephen Duncombe (2007) writes on the 'the age of fantasy' and the need to embrace emotional narrative and spectacle within political discourse. "…reality and fantasy don't inhabit separate spheres, they coexist and intermingle. Reality needs fantasy to render it desirable, just as fantasy needs reality to make it believable" (2007, p. 10). This claim for the importance of stories and imagination in making reality is explored in greater detail in chapter 6 of this thesis, when I turn my attention to the role of symbolism within *Cathy.*

As an emphasis on rationality (often at the expense of emotion) is a key feature of the discourse around deliberative democracy, and arguably an important aspect of its very definition, I will not be using the term in this thesis. I have instead chosen the term democratic space. This term is closely linked with the literature on deliberative democracy and participatory democracy. As aforementioned, many of its defining features and normative foundations overlap with those of deliberative democracy (e.g. a focus on the common good). In using this term, rather than deliberative democracy, I aim to move beyond deliberative democracy's limiting dependence on (male) rational thinking and traditional understandings of discussion or debate. As this thesis is focused on the potential democratic role of theatre, which, as I shall explore in greater detail in later chapters, places great emphasis on emotional experience, the limited approach of deliberative democracy is unsuited to my aims.

2.4 A framework for a useful democratic space

In this thesis I will be using the term 'democratic space'. I will now lay out a framework for what a useful democratic space may be, based on classic and contemporary literature from democratic theory. A democratic space refers to

'arenas for public participation… where people gather, bounded in time as well as dimension' (Cornwall, 2004, p. 1), although this could arguably also be a virtual space (Coleman & Sampaio, 2017). Democratic space also refers to the incorporeal notion of space, referring to 'ongoing occasion for differences' (Scott, 2008, p. 301) or 'an opening, an invitation to speak or act' (Cornwall, 2004, p. 1). "Instead of thinking of places as areas with boundaries around, they can be imagined as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understanding" (Massey, 1994, p. 154). This understanding of space is particularly relevant to the requirements of the definition of democratic space I will be using throughout this thesis, outlined below. The power dynamics and social construction of these spaces is of concern in this thesis: "space cannot exist *in itself*; it is produced" (Goonewardena, Kipfer, Milgrom, & Schmid, 2008, p. 28). How global and local structural factors and inequalities relate to the individuals within the democratic space is also relevant to this thesis (Massey, 1994). However, whilst relevant, the production or contextual politics of the space is not the focus of this thesis – rather I aim to create a framework by which we may better understand the components of a healthy and useful democratic space. My use of the term 'space' may be best understood in relation to Arendt's 'associational view' of public space as occuring wherever citizens "act in concert" and "where freedom can appear" (as quoted by Benhabib, 1997, p. 4). This is to say that the physical location is of little importance. For Arendt, public space could as easily appear in a field as in a town hall, as its definition is dependent on the qualities of the discourse, rather than any physical location.

An underlying normative assumption within the literature around participatory democracy, as well as within this thesis, is that a healthy democracy requires effective channels of communication between citizens and the state, and citizen engagement is key for equitable and effective public policy (Castor, 2011; Floridia, 2013; Pateman, 2012; Young, 2000). However, as Cornwall & Coelho (2004) point out, like other forms of democracy, there is often a gap between 'normative expectations and empirical realities' (p.5). This chapter will be laying out a framework for a useful democratic space. This framework is more in-keeping with normative expectations than empirical realities, as (when all the elements are put together) it constitutes an ideal type, which is highly aspirational. This is useful

when defining terms, however, it is important to note that when realities do not live up to ideals it does not necessarily mean failure. Normative expectations serve to support progress, not a fixed end goal, and as the needs and ambitions of a society change, these normative expectations will also shift. I will delve further into this approach in chapter 4 of this thesis, when I lay out my methodology and research approach.

Prior to laying out my own framework, I wish to briefly illustrate this definition of democratic space with some examples of more traditional democratic spaces. It should be noted that these examples do not necessary portray ideal versions of democratic space, nor is this an examination of their relative success or democratic value. These examples merely serve to illustrate the concept of what democratic spaces may look like, and will be referred to in subsequent chapters as 'traditional democratic spaces'.

The first example is of participatory budgeting, in which citizens come together to write the budgets for their own local government. Olin Wright and Fung (2001) offered this as an example of their concept of 'empowered deliberative democracy', which 'beyond achieving effective and fair public outcomes, also attempt to advance the venerable democratic value of engaging citizens in sustained and meaningful participation' (p. 27). The technique of participatory budgeting originated in Brazil in 1989, and has since been used extensively across Brazil, and the world (Coleman & Sampaio, 2017, p. 759). The classic example of participatory budgeting is from Porto Alegro, where the practice began. It is "a system which devolves substantial power to participants" (Baiocchi, 2001, p. 43), and 'close to 20% of the city council's public budget was allocated via participatory budgetting in 1994' (ibid. p.47). These iniatives have been consistently well attended across Brazil, with participation of 13,687 citizens during 1998 in Porto Allegro (p. 49). Significantly, these iniatives have been particularly well attended by poorer residents. Coleman and Sampaio (2017), more recently, explored efforts to digitize the participatory budgeting in Belo Horitzonte, Brazil. Here, the city council experimented with taking the discussion forums and voting procedures online (as well as continuing with in-person forms of participatory budgeting). This e-participatory budgeting aimed to engage with young people and the middle classes, who have been traditionally under-represented in participatory budgeting

initiatives. In its first year this experiment saw significant up-take, indeed, 10% of the city's population engaged with the online process (Coleman & Sampaio, 2017, p. 768). Although this engagement dropped in subsequent years. This raises interesting questions for democratic spaces and suggests that there is scope for democratic spaces to take on virtual, as well as physical forms.

The second example is Occupy[17]. I have chosen this as a distinct example from participatory budgeting in terms of its relationship with formal political institutions. This is to demonstrate the broad range of activities which we may understand as democratic spaces and to acknowledge that democratic spaces may not be led by formal political institutions. Occupy was neither instigated or condoned by formal institutions. Indeed, some commentators have argued that the Occupy movement does not merely disobey "our civil strutures of laws and political institutions, but…rejects conventional political rationality, discourse and strategies" (Mitchell, Harcourt, & Taussig, 2013, p. 47). This is apparent in its refusal to formulate a reform agenda and deep antipathy towards representation both in terms of government and internal leaders (Steinberg, 2014, p. 704). Yet democracy and creating democratic spaces was at the centre of the project – 'to allow for occupations that generate possibilities without imposing ideologies' and to create 'general assemblies in every backyard and street corner' (Mitchell et al., 2013, p. 48). It is also an apt example of democratic space, given "the issue of space is at the core of its agenda: by articulating the symbolic significance of particular spaces and… its reinvigoration of the 'right to the city' debates" (Pickerill & Krinsky, 2012, p. 280). A key outcome of the occupations was to draw attention to symbolism, laws and exclusions which govern public spaces[18]. In terms of creating democratic spaces, a primary feature of the Occupy movement was the 'general assembly', in which participants would gather to discuss social and political issues. Enabling egalitarian and inclusive forms of discourse was central to these assemblies and participants developed innovative tools suited to the

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[17] Occupy is a global political movement broadly focused on issues of social and economic inequality. It is characterized by protestors literally 'occupying' spaces with tents, placards, play areas, stages, and spaces for conversation, libraries and food halls. It is also known for its non-hierarchical governance and emphasis on seeking out new democratic forms. The first largescale Occupy protest took place on Wall Street in 2011.

[18] Including interesting debates around how inclusive the movement was for homeless people already living on the streets where the occupations took place (Pickerill and Krinsky 2012).

contexts of large outdoor deliberative spaces, "including hand signals and the 'human mic' (or 'people's mic'), to facilitate a discursive praxis of egalitarianism" (Steinberg, 2014, p. 703). These general assemblies can be taken as emblematic of the concept of democratic space.

For this thesis, I have defined five key elements of a useful democratic space, based on my preliminary research into historical and contemporary democratic theory:

1) Inclusivity (*who is in the space*);

2) Listening and exchange (*the nature/quality of the space)*;

3) Discourse on the common good (*the focus of the space*);

4) Imagination and a belief in alternatives (*the plurality of the space*);

5) Political efficacy (*the wider impact of the space*).

The second element, on listening, has disproportionate space in this chapter: this is because to explore listening, it is necessary to address freedom of speech – not because it is more significant than the other elements. These five key elements have been inspired by current and classic literature on democracy and, in particular, the work around deliberative and participatory democracy, outlined above. This framework will be used throughout this thesis and provides a theoretical structure of analysis and evaluation for my empirical work in chapters 5-8. The term 'elements', as opposed to criteria, has been used in this framework to acknowledge that this framework is not designed to determine whether or not an event can be understood as a democratic space. Rather the framework is to be used to determine the extent to which that space may be understood as a 'useful' democratic space, in what ways and where improvements could be made. This is to acknowledge that to fully achieve all five elements is a highly unlikely scenario within real life examples. It is an analytical and evaluative tool to better understand in what ways democratic spaces succeed and fail, and the ways in which they could improve.

2.4.1 Inclusivity

For John Dewey the two key democratic principles are '1) a numerous and more varied common interests and 2) freer interaction between social groups – which, in

turn, leads to continuous social readjustment' (Dewey, [1916] 1999). For a host of other political theorists, diversity of perspective and life experience are crucial to the creation of a useful democratic space. Iris Marion Young (2000) argues that democratic spaces depend on the "wisdom of the expression and criticism of the diverse options of all the members of the society" (p. 6). Nussbaum argues that inclusion in democratic process is key to human flourishing: each citizen should have an equal opportunity to engage with the political discourse which governs the society in which they live (2003). From the very early Athenian experiments, almost every scholar who approaches democratic theory acknowledges the importance of inclusivity and equal representation.

The requirement of inclusivity is crucial for the accountability of the space. That the space is open, transparent and takes care to invite/enable a diverse range of participants to take part, is important for its democratic legitimacy. In certain examples of democratic spaces, e.g. protests or citizen forums, those who take part are not elected to be there, for the space to remain accountable, anyone must be able to engage. As I go on to argue in later chapters, this presents an issue for the case studies explored in this research.

In this thesis, I also wish to draw attention to how this inclusivity is approached: in order to include a broad range of perspectives there must also be a range of approaches to discourse. Young (2000) argues that "political inclusion requires openness to a plurality of *modes of communication"* (p. 13- emphasis added). Alongside finding ways of including those who are disengaged, excluded or marginalised from democratic spaces, we must explore the "transformation of the style and terms of public debate" (ibid.). As aforementioned, deliberative democracy can limit political communication and inclusivity by placing too great an emphasis on rationality over emotive or narrative-based forms of political expression. Within this research, a useful democratic space is one in which inclusivity is supported not only through inviting a diverse range of participants into the conversation, but also seeking alternative approaches to the conversation to ensure everyone is able to speak. The potential role of artistic practice in supporting 'a plurality of modes of communication' is first highlighted by Young herself (2000). This idea is empirically tested within this research through examining the ways in which participtory theatre may offer alternative approaches

to political expression.

2.4.2 Listening and exchange

Effective communication, and what Dewey named ‘transactional listening’, are key to building the co-operation and respect between citizens necessary for a functional democratic space. “In order to have a large number of values in common, all the members of the group must have an equable opportunity to offer and take from others” (Dewey, [1916] 1999, p. 88). Like Arendt, he was not arguing for a homogenous consensus – disagreement is important to a healthy democracy. He argued that “democracy is more than a form of governance, it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience” (ibid: 87). For this ‘conjoint communicated experience’ to be effective, there must be two-way dialogue. Paulo Freire echoed this sentiment, asking “how can I dialogue if I always project ignorance onto others and never perceive my own?” (Freire, [1968] 1996, p. 71). Listening and exchange require a degree of equality between speakers. There are many factors which may contribute to this. Cornwall and Coelho argue that good facilitation within the democratic space is key in challenging “the reproduction of old hierarchies and exclusions, and enabling a greater diversity of voices *to be heard*” (2007, p. 16, emphasis added).

As noted above, for this to be achieved citizens must approach the democratic space willing to listen: ‘political voice means little if no-one is prepared to listen’ (Gambetta, 1998). Given the current political practice of ‘interruptive listening’ through which participants use the time the other is speaking to ‘reload their verbal gun’ (Wolvin & Coakley, 1995, p. 389), and ‘party lines’ by which politicians are encouraged to follow a script rather than respond considerately, it is difficult to imagine a democratic space in which listening actually occurs (Fox & Saunders, 2019).

Andrew Dobson (2014) argues that *voice* has dominated political discourse to the detriment of *listening*. He argues that we should endeavor to highlight the spectacle and skill of listening as a highly political act, both through encouraging the cultivation of this skill in our politicians and citizens, as well as developing institutional reforms which support a more responsive form of governance. The type of listening Dobson (2014) specifically encourages is ‘apophatic listening’

which “involves a temporary suspension of the listener’s categories in order to make room for the speaker’s voice and to help it arrive in its ‘authentic’ form” (p. 68). This does not mean the immediate sacrifice of one’s own views to the views of another, but encourages citizens to engage with and attempt to understand alternate views, as well as maintaining an ‘openness to having views change’ (Fishkin, 1991). To acknowledge the importance of listening is not to abandon the need for disagreement in democracy. Rather, it is to say that there is little point in political disagreement if neither party listens to opposing views, but simply waits for their opportunity to speak.

Empathy is also a recurring theme in this literature, Michael Morrell’s book *Empathy and Democracy: Feeling, Thinking and Deliberation* (2010), argues that empathy is key to facilitating listening within democratic spaces. Not only so that we are able to find common ground, but so that we may listen effectively to those we disagree with, as we can empathize with why they may hold different beliefs and understand their perspective more fully. Indeed, this may enable a stronger counter-argument to be made. Empathy and compassion (and the potential political issues with this approach) are explored in more detail in chapter 5 of this thesis in relation to my empirical work.

A focus on listening also raises important questions of *who* we should be listening to. There are some instances when listening may cause harm, or may be at odds with the inclusivity of the space. Listening to opposing views can be a dangerous undertaking: “openness involves risk and vulnerability” (Garrison, 1996, p. 433) – but is this risk worth it in all circumstances? How do we decide upon the moments to listen? This line of questioning leads to debates pertaining to the *freedom of speech* – which requires some attention in any discussion of democracy.

Saunders and Fox (2019) lay out a useful two-pronged approach to freedom of speech using Isaiah Berlin’s (1958) concepts of negative and positive freedom. I will use this framing in this brief exploration of the subject. On the negative side, Saunders and Fox (2019) place Nozick’s (1974) libertarian approach, which focuses on protecting citizens from unnecessary restraint (particularly from the state). We cannot prevent other citizens from stating their views in private or public arenas: every citizen has a right to voice their views. It follows J.S. Mill’s bold

doctrine that "…there ought to exist the fullest liberty of professing and discussing, as a matter of ethical conviction, any doctrine, however immoral it may be considered" (Mill, [1859] 2006, p. 15). There are instances which this may be limited, but in the classic libertarian view, these limitations are very rare.

According to this view, the state, and indeed other citizens, may not interfere in others' right to speak. However, it does not mean that anyone has an obligation to *listen*. Even if we accept the libertarian version of freedom of speech, it does not automatically entail that every citizen has a right to voice their opinions in the democratic space. This is related to the 'no-platform' debate sweeping universities and public events, in which certain speakers who hold views which the student body deem offensive are disallowed from speaking, e.g. in 2015/16 Germaine Greer was banned from speaking at several universities following her comments on trans-gender women (Morris, 2015). According to the libertarian view of freedom of speech, this was not necessarily a violation of Greer's freedom of speech: to deny someone a public platform is not to stop them speaking, it is only to limit the platform by which they may share their views. Indeed, Greer has been offered many other platforms through publication and invitations to speak since these events. A right to freedom of speech does not entail a right to be heard (Fox & Saunders, 2019).

However, the popular debate around the issue of 'no-platforming' generally centers around the notion of harm, hate speech, and when speech causes harm and should be limited. Even the staunchest defenders of freedom of speech would argue that there are instances in which it should be limited – for example, when it violates others' rights. This again brings us back to J.S. Mill. His 'harm principle' presents a limit to the freedom of speech: that you may pursue your freedom to express yourself so long as it does not harm others, or limit their own freedom of speech (Mill, [1859] 2006). This is broadly agreed upon across the political spectrum – what is contested is what constitutes *harm.* For example, does offence constitute harm?

A useful analysis of what may constitute harm and justify limits on freedom of speech comes from feminist thinker Rae Langton. Langton (1993) argues, in relation to pornography, that certain speech acts *silence* the freedom of speech of

others. This silencing constitutes harm and should be limited. She argues that those in positions of relative power can stop those in less powerful positions from speaking. This may be from physically stopping them (for example, imprisonment), but it may also take a subtler (although no less effective) form: "Let them speak. Let them say whatever they like to whomever they like, but stop that speech from counting as an action" (Langton, 1993, p. 299). For certain speech acts to perform their intention a degree of authority is necessary. For example, an umpire at a tennis match has the authority to call a fault, unlike a bystander. Langton argues that one way to silence another is to take away the authority they need to make their speech act count: a phenomena she dubs 'illocutionary disablement'. She claims that "the ability to perform illocutionary acts can be viewed as a measure of authority, a measure of political power" (p. 316)[19].

Langton uses the example of Linda Lovelace to illustrate her argument. Lovelace, the star of a pornographic film called *Deep Throat,* wrote a testimony called *Ordeal* in which she describes the abuse she suffered in the making of the film. Lovelace intended the book to be a criticism of the industry and a protest against her (and other porn stars) abuse. However, when the book was published it was widely marketed and distributed as a form of pornography in itself. She uses the right words – which graphically depict her own subordination, and she intends to protest. 'However, something about who she is, something about the role she occupies, prevents her speech acts having the desired effect' (p. 322). This literally prevents the speaker from having their words meet their aim, and for Langton, this is an example of *silencing.*

This has relevance for democratic space in terms of determining whether there is speech that should be disallowed from the space. To allow each speaker an equal opportunity to be heard, there may be a need to disallow speech acts which silence others.

Another way of approaching freedom of speech, and potentially a more useful one in terms of democratic space, takes ensuring the *positive freedom* of citizens as its

[19] This work on silencing also links back to Freire's work on dialogue and 'true words', which will be revisited in relation to my empirical studies in chapter 6.

starting point (Berlin, 1958). Rather than arguing for freedom *from* restraints or, on the other hand, justifications for these restraints, using positive freedom as a starting point focuses the debate on *enabling* equal access to opportunities for speech. Saunders and Fox (2019) have labelled this approach the 'deliberative position'. The argument from this position is that even if freedom of speech is protected from state intervention, there is still not an equality of access to this right and for it to be effective, this must be facilitated. This approach to freedom of speech seems to echo important aspects of the useful democratic space in terms of inclusivity: all in the democratic space ought to have equal opportunity to speak and be heard.

This claim returns us to Langton's work on silencing (1993) and 'illocutionary disablement'. Arguably, in these instances, "liberty must be sacrificed in order to protect disadvantaged groups from social stigmatization and subordination" (Fiss, 1996, p. 5) in order to ensure equal access to everyone's right to be heard. For example, allowing white supremacists to voice their views on the inferior intelligence and moral worth of people of colour allows them to *silence* the people of colour in the room. Their speech leads to the illocutionary disablement of people of colour as when it comes time for them to voice their political views they may be viewed as less qualified or less able to voice complex opinions. Their opinions and arguments may be seen as less politically valid given the white supremacist arguments heard.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to fully untangle the complex debate surrounding freedom of speech. A useful democratic space is interested in facilitating and enabling a wide range of voices and a high quality of listening and exchange. In some instances, this will require the censorship of certain views which disrupt and limit the opportunities of others to speak and be heard.

2.4.3 Discourse on the common good

Hannah Arendt's public realm is a very influential concept within this area of study. She argues that the value of the public realm, as opposed to the private realm, is that it allows for the "simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects…for which no common measurement or denominator can ever be devised" (Arendt, [1959] 2019, p. 57) . Dewey referred to the common good as the 'public

opinion'. He argued that along with a diverse range of views, we must also acknowledge "mutual interests as a factor in social control" (Dewey, [1916] 1999, p. 87). This was echoed by when Arendt argued:

> the more people's standpoints I have present in my mind while I am pondering a given issue, the better I can imagine how I would feel and think if I were in their place, the stronger will be my capacity for representative thinking and the more valid my final conclusions, my opinion. (as quoted by Bickford, 1996, p. 82)

John Rawls' work also makes the case for discourse focussed upon shared values and principles to come to an 'overlapping consensus' ([1971] 1999). Although Arendt was sceptical of the notion of consensus – a scepticism shared within this thesis – all these thinkers agree that disagreement and a plurality of perspective is necessary for the common good, and that democratic discourse must essentially focus on the same goal: the collective flourishing for all in society. What 'flourishing' looks like and how it may be achieved forms the content of the discourse within the democratic space.

Fundamentally, the democratic space should aim to move us beyond the prevailing Schumpeterian view of democracy as a simple aggregation of individual preferences based on the manipulation and persuasion of politicians (according to rational self-interest) (Elster, 1986). As articulated above, this view of democracy is closely equated with market mechanisms: voting becomes a kind of economic transaction in which we opt for political parties based on our preference between competing 'brands'. Within a democratic space the effort is focused towards outcomes which benefit all in society. Arendt ([1959] 2019) also argued that beyond considering our fellow citizens in political discourse, the current generation must also recognize their responsibility to future generations as future citizens. This is a view which has been developed and reiterated in more recent literature concerning environmentalism (eg. Davies, 2017).

There may be conflict between inclusivity and the discourse on the common good within democratic spaces. Useful democratic spaces simultaneously welcome a broad range of views, yet also requires citizens to act as part of the collective. In this thesis I adopt an Arendtian position, which argues the public realm (or in this

instance ‘the democratic space’) is distinct from the private realm precisely because it is concerned with the common world, as opposed to individual interests.

> For this world of ours, because it existed before us and is meant to outlast our lives in it, simply cannot afford to give primary concern to individual lives and the interests connected with them; as such the public realm stands in the sharpest possible contrast to our private domain where, in the protection of family and home, everything serves and must serve the security of the life process. (Arendt, 1960, p. 35)

According to this view, the citizens gathered in the democratic space are not united because they think alike, or bounded to a political consensus, but because “there is a mutual commitment to the continuance of the same public world” (Canovan, 1983, p. 297). To act and speak according to one’s individual concerns is the role expected of citizens within Schumpeter’s ‘elitist model of democracy’ explored above – and the role accepted as part of neoliberalism assumption of individualism (or rational choice theory). To focus discourse within the democratic space around individual interests undermines the role of plurality, listening and exchange, as discussed above, as the space becomes an exercise in aggregating personal preferences, rather than the exchange of views. Gathering together, as citizens, to explore how we may govern, change or improve society for all is the focus of a useful democratic space.

However, it must be noted that the line between private, individual interests and the common good is rarely so clear. The private and public spheres are closely intertwined, and the persepctives and ideas offered within the democratic space will be embedded within experiences of the private sphere[20] – and these perspectives are useful to the discourse on the common good.

In this thesis I acknowledge the porous nature of these two spheres, but still utilise this Arendtian approach, for the following two reasons. Firstly, this position usefully lays out an approach to the common good focussed on the interests of the collective, as opposed to a Schumpeterian model of preference aggregation. Secondly, Arendt’s ‘agnositc approach’ forefronts the importance of past and future

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[20] Feminist critiques of Arendt have challenged her division of the public and private spheres on these grounds. (Benhabib, 1997).

generations within her concept of the public sphere. "…ultimately it is the space in which one seeks a guarantee against the futility and passage of all things human… the space protected against its futility and reserved for the relative permanence, if not immortality, of mortals" (Benhabib, 1997, p. 5). This is crucial to thinking about the relationship between sustainable prosperity and democracy, as laid out in chapter 1. The democratic space must be focussed on long-term goals (Smart, 2019), and must acknowledge the interconnected relationship between human life and the broader natural world.

To ensure inclusivity and a useful standard of listening and exchange, it is important that opposing views are welcomed within the space – as explored above, plurality and disagreement are important to democratic discourse. Often, democratic spaces will be focussed on a particular political goal, and whilst there may be agreement amongst participants that this is a goal which ought to be addressed, how it is addressed will differ. For example, within the Occupy protests there was a shared consensus that the current system was not working and that growing inequalities in society needed to be addressed. However, the protests actively shunned coherent political demands and avoided being defined by any one traditional ideology. As Harcourt writes, 'the Occupy movement takes on both big government and the neoliberal illusion of free markets… the posters of Zuccotti Park challenged both sides of the ideological divide' (2013, p. 50). In this democratic space, there was a shared focus in terms of the need for change, that the system was not working for 'the 99%', yet multiple political ideas and approaches co-existed. Overall, a focus on the common good is a foundational element of a democratic space – it is not a space for perference aggregation.

2.4.4 Imagination and a belief in alternatives

Another important element of democratic spaces is that it invites the exploration of *alternatives* to current political structures. This is a crucial aspect of democracy: a belief that change is possible and that citizens may effect political and social change. Democracy demands the possibility of alternatives as 'a belief in unchangableness cements power and prevents change' (Hammond, 2016). Ruth Levitas (2013) presents utopian thinking as a method by which to reimagine what is possible in our society and move the norm away from current political and economic structures. Through utopian thinking the radical and the unrealistic can

become genuine possibilities, and can be reconstructed as political goals to work toward. Utopia as method can ‘facilitate genuinely holistic thinking about possible futures, combined with reflexivity and democratic engagement with the principles and practices of those futures’ (Levitas, 2013, p. xi). This is reiterated more recently in William Davies’ work on political economy, utopias and science fiction: ‘the first step in political change is simply believing alternatives are possible’ (Davies, 2017, p. 19).

This sits in direct opposition to neoliberal rationality and its denial of alternatives. By using the term ‘utopia’, Levitas implicitly critiques the narrative that alternatives to neoliberalism are naïve and unrealistic. Radical, impossible and outlandish ideas – like (by definition) utopias – are all necessary for democracy, as it is through our exploration of these ideas, and our attempts to enact them, that political change can occur.

Nussbaum (2013; 2010) also argues that imagination is crucial for democracy in many ways – particularly in enabling citizens to empathise and relate to one another.

> Imagining in one another inner faculties of thought and emotion is crucial to democracy, because democracy is built upon respect and concern, and these in turn are built upon the ability to see other people as human beings, not simply as objects. (2010, p. 6).

She argues that access to arts and culture, as well as humanities subjects within education, are crucial to exercising our capacity for imagination.

Participatory theatre is essentially an imaginative endeavour and, as I shall detail in later chapters, the case studies selected for this research both explicitly invite audiences to imagine alternative social and political realities. The act of imagination is a key link in the literature which has brought together the arts and political discourse (Beausoleil, 2013; Duncombe, 2007; Hammond & Ward, 2019; Levitas, 2017), and shall be addressed with further theoretical detail in chapter 3, and empirically in chapters 5-8.

2.4.5 Political efficacy

This term often refers to citizens’ feelings and perception of their own political role.

It is often used to describe citizens' trust in formal politics (sometimes referred to as 'external political efficacy') and their sense of possible personal political influence (sometimes referred to as 'internal political efficacy') (Morrell, 2005; Pollock, 1983; Wolak, 2018). Whilst this understanding of the term is relevant to this thesis, my usage predominately refers to the political impact of democratic spaces as a whole. Both in terms of its influence on policy and/or broader social change, and its effect on the political literacy and confidence of participants. To attempt to break down this complex element of democratic space, I have divided my use of the term in this thesis into three sub-categories: a) policy influence, b) political literacy (public opinion/understanding of key issue) and c) political confidence (influence on participants self- perception as political actors – e.g. activists or citizens).

The political value of a democratic space is often judged against its ability to influence policy, although how one measures policy influence remains highly contested (Kang, 2015; Weidenbaum, 2010). Democratic spaces have been described as "the interface between the state and society" (Cornwall & Coelho 2007, p.1). This relationship requires a careful balance between state involvement and independence. On the one hand, it is important that the decisions made within the democratic space, which require policy change, have the chance to influence policy. On the other hand, democratic spaces require the critical distance to hold government to account, radically oppose systems/structures and not be co-opted into simply delivering governmental aims.

The dependence on the state for legitimacy is a trait regularly critised in various forms of participatory and deliberative democracy. Some scholars have argued that deliberative democracy offers only a tokenistic form of citizen empowerment, and uses Habermas' 'twofold source of legitimacy' for illustration: "a democratic decision may be founded: first, a discursive and deliberative legitimacy, produced in the public sphere; second, the institutional legitimacy deriving from the rule of law within a democratic State and its constitutional foundations" (Floridia, 2013, p. 7). Although citizens are brought into the decision-making process, often within these democratic spaces (although not all) the final decision rests with policy-

makers. In terms of Arnstein's 'Ladder of Participation'[21] (1969) this places these spaces mid-way up around 'Consultation' or perhaps 'Partnership', but does not manage to climb to the heights of 'Citizen Control'. This is a criticism which could also be easily applied to many forms of democratic spaces. However, not all democratic spaces will seek institutional legitimacy, but rather aim to effect political change in direct opposition of governmental structures through the use of protest (such as Extinction Rebellion or Occupy), or even avoid any direct relationship with formal politics.

Political efficacy does not necessarily entail direct engagement with government representatives – there are many reasons why groups or activities may choose not to engage with formal political institutions directly. Cornwall & Coelho (2007, p. 23) quote a Brazilian activist who argues that some spaces which operate outside more traditional structures may provide 'schools for citizenship in which those who participate learn new meanings and practices of citizenship by working together'. Political efficacy in democratic spaces may also include 'democratic learning' and the facilitation of political discussion, however much of the literature subtly prioritises impact which results in shifts in government policy. This brings us to the second two sub-catergories of political efficacy: b) political literacy, and c) political confidence.

For some democratic spaces the primary aim is not to influence policy but to raise the profile of a key issue, or encourage a better understanding of this issue amongst a specific group. Even if policy influence remains the key ambition, awareness raising amongst participants (and perhaps the broader public depending on the event) may well be a useful and important side effect. For example, the Greenham Common anti-nuculear protests in the 1980s raised awareness of the issue of disarmament and foreign nuclear weapons being positioned within the UK. Through letter writing campaigns and significant media attention, many citizens became interested in, and informed on the issue. However, it may be more difficult to point to direct, tangible policy impacts.

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[21] Sherry Arnstein's seminal work, *The Ladder of Participation* offers a hierarchical typology for thinking about citizen engagement within political decision making. At the bottom of the ladder sits 'Manipulation' and the top wrung is 'Citizen Control'.

Political confidence refers back to understandings of internal and external political efficacies in terms of trust in democratic processes and sense of one's personal potential political impact. For example, Occupy's general assemblies "seek to encourage a platform for full participation… especially among the long disenfranchised, perhaps dissipating the apathy that is the psychological symptom of systematic exclusion" (Steinberg 2014, p.704). The aim here was not necessarily policy reform, or even awareness raising around a specific issue, but a more generalised sense of fostering political power amongst participants.

2.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have articulated the social and political motivation for this research, namely the neoliberal threat to democracy. The work of this chapter has been to situate my research within the field of democratic theory, as well as offer an original framework for a useful democratic space, rooted in classic and contemporary democratic theory. This thesis is particularly concerned with exploring approaches to overcoming the neoliberal threat to democracy. In this chapter I have argued that democratic spaces can offer an antidote to the limited Schumpeterian notion of democracy, and the threats posed by neoliberal policy and neoliberal rationality. In my framework, the useful democratic space does this through ensuring a broad range of perspectives are both present and able to contribute; focussing on the common good and collectivity; inviting citizens to play an active and meaningful role in policy-making; and providing opportunities for imagination and exploring alternatives.

At the beginning of this chapter I offered an overview of some key theorists who have greatly influenced contemporary understandings of democracy, and offer philosophical groundings for importance of the interrelated democratic values of equality, plurality and freedom. I then sought to offer a clear definition of how I will be using the term neoliberalism, and how this —and the Schumpeterian approach to democracy implicated in the neoliberal system – undermine democracy in the UK. Although I draw heavily from the literature on deliberative democracy, I have chosen not to use this term due to its dependence on rationality, which, I argue, limits alternative approaches to discourse within democratic spaces (as well as implicating historical biases against women and people of colour). Given that this thesis is focussed upon theatre practice, and specifically the audience's

participation within and experience of this practice, the role of emotions and alternative modes of expression play a significant role in my research. Therefore, I have chosen the more neutral term ‘democratic spaces’. In the final section of this chapter I outlined a framework for useful democratic spaces. Each of the five elements addressed in this framework are difficult to achieve: they require great ambition and dedication, not only to political ends, but also to the process of political decision making. This framework seeks to provide a typology by which we can better understand and evaluate the usefulness of a democratic space. I will use this typology as a theoretical framework throughout this thesis.

This is an interdiscplinary project and, alongside situating my work within democratic theory, I also hope to situate my work within the discourse on the civic role of the arts. In chapter 3, I shall turn my attention to participatory theatre and, using the framework articulated in this chapter, present the ways in which it presents an important subject of research for the understanding of democratic spaces.

Chapter 3: The history and democratic potential of participatory theatre

There is a growing body of theatre productions and academic literature which examines the relationship between political participation and participatory theatre practice. The political role of theatre is nothing new – in Western culture, like democracy itself, it dates back to ancient Greece. As addressed in the previous chapter, the first theatres were *fora*, built in Athens in the fifth century BC as civic spaces. The first plays, tragedies like *Trojan Women* and *Antigone*, posed contemporary political and moral questions to their audiences as stimuli for discussion and debate. The theatre was a pillar of Athenian democracy (Wilson, 2018). More recently, practitioners like Brecht and Artaud made theatre which aimed to "upset all our preconceptions, inspiring us with a fiery, magnetic imagery…" to provoke "the ferment of mass, agitated crowds" (Artaud, [1964] 2017, p. 60).

The focus of this thesis is participatory theatre, in which the audience and the community participate in the creation and/or performance of the work. Indeed, the specific focus of this thesis is on this participation, and how it is experienced by the audience. This work builds on the political work of theatre makers like Artaud and Brecht, as well as the 'participatory turn' in the political movements of the 1960s (Bishop, 2012). The socio-political role of participatory theatre has been addressed from two broad perspectives. The first body of literature on the subject has emerged from Theatre Studies, Cultural Policy and Media and Communications – within both academic and arts sector publications (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008; Doeser & Vona, 2016; Matarasso, 1997; Prentki & Preston, 2009; Sloman, 2011 amongst others). However, these publications and studies often overlook the potential role for participatory theatre in more formal political terms, for example its' potential as a form political engagement *in itself*. When this literature directly addresses participatory arts, it tends to focus on the role and experience of those who participate in the creation of the work, rather than the experience and participation of the audience – which is the focus of this thesis.

The second body of literature exploring the potential socio-political role of theatre comes from a Politics and Political Theory perspective (Chou et al., 2015;

Coleman, Pothong, & Weston, 2018; Mattern & Love, 2013; Ryan & Flinders, 2018). Within this literature scholars have argued that participatory theatre could provide an innovative approach to political participation, in a time of dwindling engagement with the democratic process. However, these offerings often present a highly instrumentalised vision of the role of theatre and, at times, present participatory theatre as a kind of panacea which fails to adequately address the limitations of this approach.

In this thesis I position myself at the nexus of these two areas of exploration in terms of the political potential of participatory theatre. This thesis aims to offer an original contribution to both fields, and address some of the limitations and gaps mentioned above, by bringing these two bodies of work together. Whilst the previous chapter drew primarily from Political Theory, this chapter aims to put forward an argument for why participatory theatre may be a useful approach to creating democratic spaces. It will also examine its potential limitations, with particular reference to literature from Theatre Studies and Cultural Policy, as well as reports from (and my own experience as a practitioner) within the arts sector.

In this chapter I will begin by examining the discourse surrounding the term participatory theatre, and its conceptual cousin, participatory art. Participatory theatre is a term used in different ways across academic disciplines and theatre practice. Indeed, the two case studies explored in this thesis understand the term differently. In this chapter, I will give particular attention to Theatre of the Oppressed as there is a significant body of literature exploring it as an emblematic form of participatory theatre, and it is also the technique used by one of my case studies (Cardboard Citizens' production of *Cathy).* Following this, I will map the framework for a useful democratic space, articulated in the previous chapter, onto the concept of participatory theatre. The overall aim of this chapter is to draw links between the theoretical work of chapter 2 and the literature surrounding the concept of participatory theatre in order to lay the foundation for the empirical work of chapters 5 to 8.

3.1 Participatory theatre: what and for whom?

Participatory theatre has been used to describe a wide range of performance practice. From an applied theatre perspective the term is frequently used to describe

practice in which practitioners work alongside non-professionals to create a theatre piece. The theatre movements most closely associated with the term are: theatre-in-education (or TIE), Grotowski's Poor Theatre and Theatre of the Oppressed. As Sloman argues: "These movements aimed to break down conventional theatre and art, change the relationship between audiences and art, and support social change" (Sloman, 2011, p. 43). There have been a significant number of empirical studies which aim to demonstrate the social benefits of participatory theatre around the world: post-conflict reconciliation (Fox, 2009; Sloman, 2011); international development (Barker, 2019); community cohesion (Matarasso, 1997, 2007, 2019), and citizenship education (Bell & Desai, 2011; Howe, 2009), to name a few. The underpinning of this body of literature can be distilled into the broad argument that participating in the creation of theatre can have positive social and personal impacts. Within this literature, participatory theatre is often normatively described as "for and by the community" (Sloman, 2011, p. 44). The *participatory* element, from this perspective, refers to the process of its creation. The degree to which it achieves meaningful engagement with the 'community' (for example, the extent to which the work has been led by participants) is often the yard stick with which the work is judged by researchers and industry peers. Although, there is no single, agreed-upon measure to judge what 'meaningful engagement' looks like and measures of success vary widely.

Matarasso (2019) argues that, in recent years, participatory art has become more mainstream in practice and policy:

> "It has spread from the marginal urban and rural spaces it occupied in the 1970s to the centres of cultural power. It can be found in arts and cultural institutions; social, urban and economic policy; health and education services; criminal justice; housing; the voluntary sector; the media; across the Internet, and in communities everywhere." (p. 21)

He illustrates this with many examples of mainstream use of participatory arts practice: the winners of the Turner Prize 2015 (a collective called *Assemble*) and their approach of working with the communities who inhabit the spaces they create; or the commitment to a community- led approach by recently formed national companies like the National Theatre of Scotland and the National Theatre of Wales.

Matarasso argues that this normalisation offers opportunities to make arts institutions more accessible, and widen opportunities for meaningful engagement with the arts. This type of work has also gained prominence within funding structures, with the importance of involving non-artists in creation strongly emphasised within the Arts Council's latest 10-year strategy 'Let's Create' (Arts Council England, 2020).

However, with its increased popularity, the language of participatory arts has also been co- opted and misused by those who do not fully understand the democratic principles which underpin the practice (Matarasso, 2019, pp. 25-26). Matarasso's concerns reflects my own observations within the sector. Within organisations, I have observed[22] a number of venues and organisations emphasising the work of their education and artist development departments – often using terms like 'participatory' and 'community-led', whilst these departments remain the least resourced within the organisation. This disconnect between rhetoric and funding is also reflected in Arts Council England's (ACE) funding allocations around the country. Despite an increased prominence for participatory arts, and an acknowledgement that (often) this work is strongest within small, community-based initiatives (Arts Council England, 2020; Matarasso, 2019), the vast majority of ACE's funding goes to large National Portfolio Organisations (NPOs). For example, the six[23] best funded NPOs receive almost the same level of annual ACE support as the entire Project Grants[24] programme (Arts Council England, 2018). This is a complex issue and it is beyond the scope of this thesis to unpick the rationales for various funding structures within the sector. I use these examples to illustrate the frequent disconnect between the rhetoric surrounding 'participatory art' and the reality of the practice. Fundamentally, it remains a largely underfunded sub-section of the industry, despite a recent emphasis on this kind of work.

This rise in the popularity of the term participatory art, and, by extension, participatory theatre as a subsection of this approach, makes it an important subject

[22] These are anecdotal observations, emerging from my work as a theatre practitioner, as well as my work within strategic development groups within the sector.

[23] These NPOs are: Royal Opera House, Southbank Centre, National Theatre, Royal Shakespeare Company, English National Opera and Opera North Ltd.

[24] This is the funding stream designed to support individual artists, community groups and arts organisations without National Portfolio Organisation status, and therefore, the funding stream most likely to support smaller, community-based organisations and projects.

to be studying at this moment. This thesis aims to add to the growing body of literature exploring the opportunities and limitations of this approach. Given the simultaneous increase in attention on participatory democracy, as described in the previous two chapters, this demonstrates a potentially useful overlap. Like the values and language of participatory art have been co-opted and misused by established arts institutions, so has participatory democracy been co-opted and misused by policy-makers (Cunningham & Lechelt, 2020; Jancovich, 2017). The aim of this thesis is to use the framework outlined in the previous chapter to address this concern within political participation, and explore the potential for participatory theatre to provide useful and meaningful routes for citizen engagement in political discourse.

Francois Matarasso (2013, 2019) argues that the term 'participatory art' is in fact a kind of replacement term for 'community arts', which although still used, has widely fallen out of usage amongst practitioners. In regard to this history, participatory art is wrapped up in grassroots community activism since the 1960s. "Although connected with older traditions of cultural emancipation, community art's immediate roots lie in the artistic, social and political experimentation of the 1960s" (2013, p. 217) and was inextricably linked with the broader community development movement. The movement was defined by the United Nations as "…a movement to promote better living for the whole community with active participation and if possible on the initiative of the community[25]" (UN, 1953, p. 33). Matarasso (2013) argues that the dismissal of 'community arts' is tied up with the political capture and depoliticisation of neoliberalism (addressed in the previous chapter), as well as a desire to disassociate with the term 'community', which was used by the Thatcher government in widely unpopular social policy decisions such as the 'Community Charge' (also known as the Poll Tax).

I would argue that the shift away from the term 'community arts' has also sought to distance the practice (both justly and unjustly) from patronising initiatives aimed at ill-defined 'disadvantaged communities' as a cultural deficit to be addressed, rather than communities with their own cultural practices. This criticism of

[25] The community development movement is also linked with the development of the concept of 'co-production' within urban development (Hamdi, 2004).

community arts can equally be launched at participatory arts – particularly when the value of this work is reduced to its potential social benefits. In this thesis I argue the value of participatory work should not be judged solely by its social achievements or the extent to which it was 'participatory', it should also be viewed in light of its aesthetic value. As Claire Bishop states, "By avoiding questions of artistic criteria, the community arts movement unwittingly perpetuated the impression that it was full of good intentions and compassion, but ultimately not talented enough to be of broader interest" (Bishop, 2012, p. 190). This approach can devalue the work for both the artists and non-artists involved and ultimately raises the question – why art? If the primary goal is social development, there may well be more effective methods.

This stance was a key underpinning in the selection of my two case studies: *We Know Not What We May Be* by METIS, and *Cathy* by Ali Taylor and Cardboard Citizens. Both of these participatory theatre pieces sought to create moving, challenging and engaging theatrical experiences, and these aims were indivisible from their political and social aims. As I shall elaborate on later in this chapter, and throughout this thesis, the artistic nature of the work, and its aesthetic quality, were crucial to its political aims (and often vice versa). To judge participatory work only by its social impact is damaging to the quality of the work in terms of its political value, as well as its aesthetic value.

Claire Bishop (2012) defines participatory art with reference to the artwork associated with the 'participatory turn' and specifically the Situationist International (SI) created in Paris in the 1960s. The slogan "To be free in 1968 means to participate" was important to this practice and experimentation with interaction, games and labyrinth were hailed as 'a popular new democratic mode' (Bishop, 2012, p. 79). This use of the concept of 'democracy' in relation to arts and culture has seen renewed interest recently with the term 'cultural democracy', for which there is a growing body of work – both within the academy and within the cultural sector (Doeser & Vona, 2016; Gross & Wilson, 2018; Hadley & Belfiore, 2018; Hunter & Micklem, 2016). Much of this literature is particularly interested in the inclusivity and the accessibility of arts and culture, rather than specifically participatory work, or a relationship with the more explicitly political usage of the term 'democracy'. In this thesis I aim to articulate the potential role of participatory

theatre within democratic processes, which sits adjacent to this inquiry into 'cultural democracy'.

Departing somewhat from the definition presented by François Matarasso, and aligning more closely with Claire Bishop's definition, within this thesis the term 'participatory theatre' refers primarily to the participation of the audience during the performance of the piece, rather than participation within the process of creation. My two case studies each come from very different approaches to participatory theatre practice. It is important to this research that there is variation in approach to demonstrate varied nature of the genre of participatory theatre. METIS defines *We Know Not What We May Be* (hereafter known as *We Know Not*) specifically as participatory theatre. They use this term primarily to refer to their performance technique, rather than their process of creating the work. The audience participates and this participation is fundamental to the performance – indeed the audience can only fully experience the piece *through* their participation. There was a degree of co-creation with non-artists in the development of *We Know Not*, which will be described in subsequent chapters. However, when the company refer to their work as 'participatory theatre' they are referring to the participatory nature of its performance, rather than its development[26]. On the other hand, Cardboard Citizens is a leading company in Theatre of the Oppressed technique. As mentioned above, this technique is emblematic of the more 'applied' understanding of participatory theatre. What these case studies have in common is that both require the participation of their audiences in order to perform their work. The involvement of the audience in the action of the piece is crucial to the performances. In this thesis I use the term participatory theatre to describe this overlap in their practice: the participation of the audience and their transformation into participants, spect-actors[27] or co-creators in the performance. It should also be noted that another key overlap between these case studies is their focus on political subjects. Both pieces

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[26] This understanding of participation raises comparisons with the term 'immersive theatre'. Immersive theatre refers to a genre in which audiences are given decision-making power within the context of the show. This work often takes place across a space, rather than on a stage. The 'immersive' element refers to the audiences' experience of being immersed in the action of the piece. The archetypal example of this genre is the work of the theatre company Punch Drunk. In this thesis I use the term participatory theatre (rather than immersive theatre) in relation to *We Know Not* because it is the term used by the company, and the political implications of the term are relevant to both my research and the content of the piece.

[27] A term used within Theatre of the Oppressed, defined later in this chapter.

sought to involve the audience in political discourse and experimentation related to how to address specified social ills. In the case of *Cathy,* this was in terms of issues related to housing policy, income precarity and homelessness, and in *We Know Not* the audience was invited to address (much broader) issues related to environmental and social sustainability.

These case studies are not only political, they also both adopt a left-wing[28] starting point. I would argue this is consistent with participatory theatre practice more broadly. As outlined above, both the applied theatre approach (associated with François Matarasso in this thesis) and the definition adopted by Claire Bishop originate from left-wing movements. Indeed, Bishop describes participatory art as "dematerialised, anti-market, politically engaged… artistic gestures of resistance" (2012, p. 13). The literature on participatory art often positions the practice in terms of its social and political role in terms of furthering issues related to traditionally left-wing causes such as social and economic inequality, and social justice. These political origins influence both participatory theatre's artistic forms, as well as its potential as a democratic space. For example, the act of inviting the audience to participate within the action of the piece is a political act. As I shall address in greater detail in relation to *Cathy* and *We Know Not,* this act is an artistic choice as well as a political one, and invites the audience into the 'realm of meaning-making' (Boal, 1979; Freire, [1968] 1996). In both my case studies, this is done with the explicit intent of transforming the audience from consumer into citizen: which sits in direct opposition to the neoliberal rationality described in chapter 2. In chapter 8 I shall also address the ways in which this left-wing positionality may undermine the inclusivity and discourse on the common good within the space.

In terms of highlighting the ways in which participatory theatre may be democratically valuable, as well as delving further into the left-wing origins of participatory theatre practice, (and given that one of my case studies uses this technique), it is important to address the technique of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) more fully.

[28] By 'left-wing' I am referring to approaches and perspectives typically associated with socialist ideology, social welfarism or social democratic approaches.

3.2 Theatre of the Oppressed

Theatre of the Oppressed is an arsenal[29] of theatre techniques with the explicit aim of social transformation and empowerment. The techniques were first developed by Augusto Boal and his company in the 1960s at the Arena Theatre of San Paulo, but were further developed and refined whilst Boal was living in exile in the 1970s (Babbage, 2004; Boal, 1979). Theatre of the Oppressed and Boal's work are closely associated with the work of Paolo Freire and his pedagogical philosophy of empowerment. Theatre of the Oppressed includes theatrical techniques such as Rainbow of Desires (which draws on Foucauldian ideas of internalised oppression), Image Theatre and Invisible Theatre. However, in this thesis I will be focussed primarily on Forum and Legislative Theatre.

There is an oft retold story of Boal's early days as a theatre maker which offers a useful insight into the origins and purpose of Theatre of the Oppressed. Whilst working with Arena Theatre of San Paulo, Boal and the company would often tour to rural areas of the country, and in the early 1960s they toured a piece which depicted a peasant uprising. Following the climactic ending, in which the actors (as peasants) "sang of their readiness to shed the blood of their oppressors" (Babbage, 2004, p. 17) a farmer, taking their words at face value, approached them and urged them to join the fight alongside the peasants. The actors made awkward excuses and did not join in the armed conflict. Through this experience Boal and the actors were made "forcibly aware of the hypocrisy of inciting action from a position of personal security" (Ibid.). This experience greatly affected Boal – although it was perhaps not until the early 1970s, whilst working in Peru on a literacy project inspired by Freire's work, that Boal devised a method which sought to address this challenge. His response was Theatre of the Oppressed, which seeks to enable "the people to reassume their protagonistic function in the theatre and in society" (Boal, 1979, p. 119). Within Theatre of the Oppressed performances audiences become *spect-actors*, engaged in a two-way exchange. "One knows how these experiments will begin but not how they will end, because the spectator is freed from his chains, finally acts, and becomes a protagonist: the spect-actor"

[29] The use of the word 'arsenal' is a conscious choice in Boal's work. For him, theatre offered a collection of revolutionary "weapons" with which to fight oppression.

(Boal, 1979, p. 142).

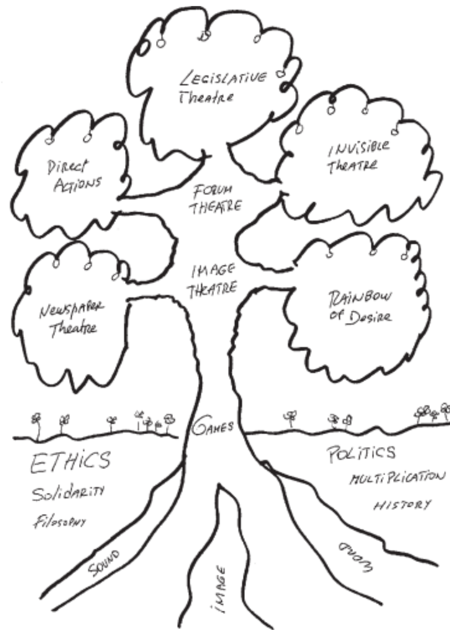

Figure 1: Tree depicting the techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed, (Boal, 2006, p. 4).

Perhaps the best known of the 'arsenal' of Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) is Forum Theatre – "a piece of theatre whose outcome is to be rewritten in action by the audience" (Jackson, 2009, p. 41). In Forum Theatre a story of oppression[30] is performed by a company of actors (often with lived experience of the oppression being presented). After the initial enactment of the story has finished, the audience become spect-actors and are invited to intervene in the piece played out before them in order to rehearse 'alternatives to an oppressive, unjust intolerable situation' (Boal, Chatterjee, & Schechner, 1998b). The audience, or spect-actors, choose moments in the story to return to and replace the protagonist in order to explore alternative options in the story to see if they can improve the tragic ending.

There is a long history of participation within political theatre and an established body of literature addressing the ways in which theatre may 'activate' its audiences. Brecht's work is a frequent reference point to the reimagining of the role of the spectator. Rancière says of Brecht and Artaud, "they intend to teach their spectators ways of ceasing to be spectators and becoming agents of a collective practice"

[30] Boal's understanding of the term 'oppression' comes from a Marxist perspective, and is used in reference to Paulo Freire and his 'Pedagogy of the Oppressed'. For Freire, and for Boal, oppression was a form of 'dehumanisation' in which those being oppressed are exploited and alienated from both the means of production and opportunities for meaning-making (Freire, [1968] 1996).

(2009, p. 8). For Boal, like for Brecht before him, the activation of the audience is explicitly aimed at humanising ‘a society numb and fragmented by the repressive instrumentalisation of capitalist production’ (Bishop, 2012, p. 11). There is a normative hierarchy to the nature of spectatorship within this literature. Both Rancière and Boal describe theatre which aims to educate its audience and treats its audience as ‘passive spectators’ as “bad”:

> …being a spectator is a bad thing for two reasons. First, viewing is the opposite of knowing: the spectator is held before an appearance in a state of ignorance about the process of production of this appearance and about the reality it conceals. Second, it is the opposite of acting: the spectator remains immobile in her seat, passive. To be a spectator is to be separated from both the capacity to know and the power to act’. (Rancière, 2009, p. 2)

And:

> Spectator is a bad word! The spectator is less than a man and it is necessary to humanize him, to restore to him his capacity of action in all its fullness. He too must be a subject, an actor on an equal plane with those generally accepted as actors, who must also be spectators. (Boal, 1979, p. 155)

Surprisingly, Rancière does not reference Boal’s work, instead focussing on the work of Brecht and Artaud, who understood the notion of active spectatorship in a more conceptual way than Boal – who opted to literally invite the spectator to become involved in the action of the piece. Artaud wished his active spectators to be a part of the emotional existence of the piece and ‘to be placed in the middle of the action and become engulfed and physically affected by it’ in his Theatre of Cruelty (originally published in 1964). For Brecht the aim of his ‘Epic Theatre’ was more intellectual. He wished to activate the spectators to critically reflect on social injustices and acknowledge change as possible – he did this through his writing and in how he presented his work. Boal was deeply influenced by Brecht’s work and he references him and his Epic Theatre a great deal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979). However, he wished to develop the theatre into a space in which the spectators were not only encouraged to think, but also to act.

This thesis is focussed on understanding the role of this work as a form of

democratic space – primarily through the experiences of its spect-actors. Therefore, understanding the role of the Joker, who facilitates this experience, is crucial. Indeed, the "Joker system" of Augusto Boal during his time at Arena Theatre of San Paulo is where techniques of Theatre of the Oppressed began to emerge (Boal, 1979). Jokers are so named as they *"do not belong to any one suit of cards – like they do not belong to either the actors or audience"* (Tim Wheeler, TO Practitioner, interviewed 14.02.2019). However, there is also a clear relationship to the archetypal fool or trickster. Through absurdity, irreverence, folly and sharp perceptiveness, the Joker's aim, like that of the fools in Shakespeare's plays or the tricksters of mythology, is to "take spect-actors into areas usually hidden by the masks of hegemony, convention and common sense" (Prentki, 2015, p. 345). The role of the Joker in Forum Theatre (and Legislative Theatre) is to push the audience to question what they've seen, to discuss it and to take part in the action of the story. The Joker hosts the forum. I shall return to the role of the Joker in chapter 6 with specific reference to *Cathy* by Cardboard Citizens.

3.3 The relationship between participatory theatre and democratic space

In this section of the chapter I aim to connect my theoretical framework for democratic spaces to the literature surrounding participatory theatre to demonstrate why and how participatory theatre could be considered a useful democratic space. This is critical to my thesis as it links my theory to the empirical work of all subsequent chapters.

Many of the thinkers drawn upon in building a theoretical framework in the previous chapter speak of the importance of 'the arts' (notably, Arendt, [1959] 2019; Dewey, [1934] 2005). Indeed, many of them specifically value theatre as an important political art form (Arendt, [1959] 2019, p. 188). For example, in *The Human Condition,* Hannah Arendt names theatre "the political art par excellence" in specific relation to Greek tragedy . These thinkers reference the different potential qualities of art in relation to their political value. For Arendt, Greek tragedy may be seen as a starting point for political and moral discourse; for Dewey arts fosters collectivity and may be seen as "communal modes of activity united the practical, the social and the educative' (Dewey, [1934] 2005, p. 327); and for Nussbaum

(2013) it is the emotional life of art which offers its political importance. I will now return to each element of my theoretical framework laid out in the previous chapter to address how each may be addressed through participatory theatre practice, and my two case studies more specifically:

Inclusivity is of paramount importance within the literature on participatory theatre. Who participates and how they participate is the subject of much of the literature on this subject. This is related to the discourse around the charge of elitism within the arts, and the statistics which portray the drastic geographical and social divides in attendance and participation in theatre (Neelands et al., 2015; Oakley, Ball, et al., 2018). As argued in chapter 2, broad participation and inclusivity are key aspects of the legitimacy of democratic spaces. Participatory theatre projects are often normatively committed to a notion of 'bottom-up' governance and "encouraging participation and involvement by people in their own developmental change" (Preston, 2009, p. 127). This mirrors some of the key underpinnings of democracy itself: "…the notion includes collective decision making, with the participation of all who will be affected by the decision or their representatives…" (Elster, 1998, p. 8). This is particularly apparent in the theory of Theatre of the Oppressed outlined above, but is also present within the community arts movements, as well as Bishop's descriptions of the 'participatory turn' and Situationist International's work.

However, as with most democratic projects, the extent to which participatory theatre manages to achieve adequate representation and inclusivity is highly variable. Despite significant efforts, both of the case studies explored in this thesis struggle with inclusivity. Unlike other, traditional democratic spaces, both *Cathy* and *We Know Not* had a cost barrier, alongside cultural and social barriers related to *who* attends the theatre, in terms of age, class and race (Neelands et al., 2015; Pyle, 2019; Torreggiani, 2019). Overall, only 15% of UK households attend the theatre more than once a year (Torreggiani, 2019). In this thesis I use the Audience Agency's 'Audience Spectrum', as well as the companies own audience data, to assess the inclusivity of these events – descriptions of these data sets and their analysis will be returned to in chapters 4, 8 and 9.

Whilst both these case studies made significant efforts to overcome barriers to

engagement for their audiences, with reasonable success, this is still a significant issue for the industry more broadly in terms of its potential role as a democratic space. There is an underlying assumption in much of the literature and industry reporting related to audience engagement that the population *should* attend the theatre, and that its failure to attract a broad and diverse audience is a bad thing. It can "assume that the cultural offer is beyond reproach, but it is the participant who must change in order to be able to take up the opportunities that are on offer" (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2019, p. 167). Within this thesis I am not claiming that participatory theatre should be attended for its own sake, or for social or educational purposes. Rather, for participatory theatre to function as a useful democratic space it must be open and inclusive for a broad and diverse audience. The issues of inclusivity within the sector raise significant limitations to the usefulness of participatory theatre as a democratic space. As shall be argued in later chapters, this limitation is not fully overcome by either METIS or Cardboard Citizens and, as such, neither can be straightforwardly understood as a useful democratic space. However, these case studies demonstrate that there are other distinctive and significant opportunities afforded by participatory theatre in terms of creating democratic spaces. One of these key opportunities is also related to inclusivity: once within the space (if accessibility barriers can be overcome), there is potential for a distinctive approach to inclusivity in terms of Iris Marion Young's call for 'a plurality of modes of communication' (2000, p. 13). Love and Mattern (2013) argue that arts practice could answer this call as "the arts and popular culture represent a terrain in which new spaces can be opened for political action" (p. 9). They go further to argue that these "new spaces opened up in the terrain of the arts and popular culture are often more accessible for relatively marginalised people" (ibid) who may be alienated by the language and formality of more traditional democratic spaces. In participatory theatre projects – including both the case studies explored in this thesis, how citizens participate in political discourse is informal, it does not emphasise rationality, indeed, it often emphasises emotional expression, imagination and playfulness.

The second element of democratic spaces is **listening and exchange**: "…what makes politics possible, and what democratic politics requires, is a kind of listening attention to one another" (Bickford, 1996, p. 2). As addressed in the previous

chapter, listening does not necessarily entail agreement, as Bickford argues, "paying attention in this way does not erase conflict; we may still have clashing needs, serious conflicts and other disagreements. But attention works as a bond because it keeps such conflict political" (p. 41).

Flinders and Ryan (2018) directly link Andrew Dobson's work on democratic listening to participatory theatre, arguing that Dobson's concept of 'apophatic listening' can be exemplified by "the embodied and performative practices of listening which take place during improvisation, image-making and other applied dramatic forms" (p. 13). As briefly touched upon in the previous chapter, Dobson's 'apophatic listening' is "a form of receptivity that breaks with or suspends existing categories, thereby making space for new or marginalised viewpoints" (Ryan & Flinders, 2018, p. 5). Flinders and Ryan argue that through participatory theatre's capacity to create liminal spaces, in which the spect-actor is 'inside' and 'outside' of a role at the same time, as well as participatory theatre's capacity to draw out experiential and affective responses, make it uniquely placed in enabling deep 'apophatic listening'. This focus on the political importance of the liminality[31] of participatory theatre spaces is explored in greater detail in chapter 7 in relation to *We Know Not*.

Enabling **discourse on the common good** requires a sense of a collective goal: a focus upon improving social and political conditions for all. It is not dependent on finding consensus, but does require that the subject of the discourse is focussed on the social and political project of improving conditions for the collective. Exchange and disagreement as to how this goal is reached is the subject of the discourse. Arguably as a precursor to participatory theatre, Brecht demanded:

> …a type of theatre which not only releases the feelings, insights and impulses possible within the particular historical field of human relations in which action takes place, but employs and encourages those thoughts and feelings which help to transform the field itself. (Brecht, [1964] 2018)

For Brecht, and many others, the aim of their work within theatre was to transform society for the better. Furthermore, Arendt argues that Brecht's work was focussed

[31] In this thesis I use Victor Turner's understanding of the term liminality, as a state 'betwixt and between' fixed realities. This will be explored in detail in chapter 7.

on the collective, and sought to "break with a tradition that insisted on the conflict or development of one character in the world" in order to "lay bare the functioning of a world" (Arendt, 1948, p. 308).

Building on Brecht's work, Augusto Boal opens his book *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) with:

> This book attempts to show that all theatre is necessarily political, because all the activities of man are political and theatre is one of them… Theatre can be a weapon for liberation. For that, it is necessary to create appropriate theatrical forms. Change is imperative. (Foreword)

For Boal, the 'appropriate theatrical form' was participatory theatre in which the audience become spect-actors, in order to play a role in the experimentation and discourse on overcoming oppressions faced.

Both of the case studies explored in this thesis have explicitly political goals and subject matter. Cardboard Citizens' *Cathy* is an invitation to play with alternatives, discuss ideas and suggest policies, all aimed at tackling the social causes and alleviating the tragic realities of homelessness. METIS' *We Know Not* is a 'factory for the future' in which spect-actors are tasked with re-writing the policies which will build a new, sustainable society. It is beyond the subject of this thesis to analyse Boal's claim that 'all theatre is political'. However, it is important to note that the vast majority of participatory theatre has political aims, and this is certainly true of the two case studies explored in this research.

Another important aspect of creating a discourse on the common good is fostering a sense of collectivity or common purpose. For most democratic theorists, spaces for citizens to gather and exchange ideas and perspectives is crucial for democracy – for Arendt ([1959] 2019) without a 'public realm', we descend into tyranny. Engagement with the public realm does not equate to conformity, but aims to foster a plurality of perspective and opinion whilst "everybody is always concerned with the same object" (Arendt, [1959] 2019, p. 57). Arendt continues with a warning against individualistic approaches to the public realm and a loss of this common purpose: "The end of the common world has come when it is seen only under one aspect and is permitted to present itself in only one perspective." (Arendt, [1959] 2019, p. 58)

Participatory theatre may have a role to play in providing the space to exercise the plurality, sense of shared purpose and permanence of the democratic space. John Dewey ([1934] 2005) argues that the origins of art are intensely social and indivisible from civic life:

> Music and song were intimate parts of the rites and ceremonies in which the meaning of group life was consummated. Drama was a vital re-enactment of the legends and history of group life… [They] celebrated and enforced traditions of race and group, instructing the people, commemorating glories, and strengthening their civic pride (p. 7).

More recently, political theorist Emily Beausoleil (2013) has written on the case of Black Popular Theatre in South Africa during apartheid. She argues that "artistic performance became a pivotal site of communication and collective inquiry" (p. 262). The polyphonic nature of the work (defined as "multi-levelled and semantic multi-voiced" p. 260) enabled "communication and a sense of solidarity among diverse and far-flung communities in all-too-rare forms of non- identical kinship" (p.268). These performance spaces became crucial political spaces in which repressed identities could be represented and alternative social realities were playfully and creatively explored.

There is an important affective element to this sense of the collective – that we feel connected, united within a broader project, rather than the feeling like an individual surrounded by other individuals, is crucial. Ben Highmore's work on mood and cultural politics is relevant here in terms of demonstrating the potential for arts practice (and in the case of this research specifically theatre practice) to build a space in which a plurality of perspectives is brought together around a common purpose. Highmore (2017) argues that broader political moods are embedded in artistic forms, and that these moods are inherently social: "the shape and texture of social experience is often best grasped as a pattern of feeling and mood" (p.3). Throughout his book, Highmore speaks of various contexts which represent this sense of a collective mood in the UK: experiences of disappointment for Caribbean migrants in the post-war decades, or a sense of morale on the Home Front during the Blitz. In each of these contexts he draws upon the artistic expressions which emerged from, and helped to shape, these contexts to explain the mood. Feelings

and moods are consciously created within artistic expressions: “moods and feelings don’t just happen, they are produced” (2017, p. 2). In the case of artistic expression, this is often to respond to, or to shape the mood of the context they emerge from. The act of producing specific feelings and mood is crucial to participatory theatre – the ways in which this has fostered a sense of collectivity and reinforced a common purpose in my case studies is explored in greater detail in chapters 5 and 7 of this thesis.

The act of **imagining alternatives** is a key aspect of the democratic space, as outlined in chapter 2. The role of imagination in participatory theatre is fundamental. The act of theatre is an act of imagining – both in terms of the imagination of the artists who have built the fictional story depicted on the stage, and well as the audiences’ own engagement with the piece. They know that the story and reality depicted within the piece is not real, yet they imagine that it is, in an effort of collective imagining. Through this act of imagination many theatre makers have attempted to build a greater role for their audiences. For example, with his ‘Epic Theatre’, Brecht sought to push his audiences to their own reflections and imaginings of how the world may be otherwise: “Here is the outlook, disconcerting but fruitful, which the theatre must provoke with its representations of human social life. It must amaze its public, and this can be achieved by a technique of alienating the familiar” ([1964] 2018, p. 186). This was an approach built upon by Boal (1979). He wished to activate the audience within the ‘alienation of the familiar’ by asking them to perform possible alternatives within the fictional world of the play. For Boal, this symbolic act served as a ‘rehearsal for reality’ (p. 155): an opportunity to experiment with techniques for overcoming oppressive realities.

As demonstrated in chapter 2 of this thesis, to push at the parameters of possible thought and action is crucial to democracy. It allows for a plurality of political perspectives on what society is possible, which is a crucial starting point for discourse and choice between these perspectives amongst citizens. The importance of imagination and a belief in alternatives is a key aspect of Wendy Browns’ (2015) work on the neoliberal rationality and the ways in which it undermines democracy. Beausoleil (2013) argues that “…resistant theatre in South Africa has also innovatively transformed established dramatic codes as a means of contesting received knowledge and the dictated parameters of possible thought and action” (p.

264). The resistance theatre of South Africa, as well as both the case studies explored in this thesis, aim to 'experiment with alternatives' to create a 'care for difference that democracy demands' (Beausoleil, 2013, p. 266).

The **political efficacy** of participatory theatre has been the subject of a number of studies within academia and the industry (Howe, 2009; Kelly-Golfman, 2018; Matarasso, 1997, 2019). As laid out in chapter 2, the use of the term 'political efficacy' in this thesis refers to: a) policy influence, b) political literacy (public opinion/understanding of key issue) and c) political confidence (influence on participants self-perception as political actors – e.g. activists or citizens). I will now explore each of these sub-themes in relation to participatory theatre practice.

Measuring the influence of one's activity on policy decisions is notoriously complex, even for think tanks (Weidenbaum, 2010) and lobbyists (Kang, 2015), for whom the explicit aim is to influence policy. There are always a broad range of factors in how policy-makers make decisions, which are rarely straightforward or transparent, and which vary greatly between different national contexts[32]. The majority of participatory theatre projects do not directly aim for policy influence. However, it is worth coming back to Augusto Boal's Legislative Theatre here – an approach which aims to create a space which is simultaneously theatre and policy-making, and in some ways, presents the most literal form of participatory theatre as a democratic space. *Cathy*, by Ali Taylor and Cardboard Citizens, which is the first of my two case studies, was performed as a piece of Legislative Theatre for its first national tour and, for its second (and final) tour, it was performed as Forum Theatre. The aims of Forum Theatre and Legislative Theatre are essentially the same: social transformation and empowerment. However, where Forum Theatre promotes discussion and rehearses possible ways to overcome oppressions from the position of the oppressed, Legislative Theatre aims to influence policy changes to alleviate oppressions. Like other experiments in participatory democracy, Legislative Theatre challenges the notion that ordinary citizens are 'not capable of making technical decisions and values the voice, experience and knowledge of a wide-range of participants as it promotes dialogical problem-solving' (Baiocchi,

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[32] This international variance has significance here as many of the studies and accounts on policy impact of theatre come from other countries.

2006, p. 78).

The contextual circumstance which led to the origins of Legislative Theatre are crucial: between 1992 and 1996 Augusto Boal became a *vereador* at the Rio de Janeiro *Camera dos Vereadores,* (similar to a city council in the UK). Boal stood as a representative of the Workers Party on behalf of Theatre of the Oppressed Rio (CTO) and, when he was unexpectedly elected, he declared it the "first time in history for a theatre company to be elected into political office" (Boal, 1998, p. 15). Through their governmental position Boal and the CTO worked with communities all over Rio including street children, teachers unions, prostitutes and specific geographical communities (Boal et al., 1998b). These groups created Legislative Theatre pieces based on the oppressions experienced in their own lives. These pieces would be shown all over the city: on the streets, as part of festivals, in schools and community buildings. In each performance audiences would intervene and join the debate, and be invited to suggest laws and policies they would like enacted to improve the situations depicted in the play. In Legislative Theatre, unlike Forum Theatre, there is a role for someone (or a number of people) versed in both Theatre of the Oppressed and in law/formal politics called the 'metabolising cell'. Their job is to note down each intervention and the subsequent discussion, which will then be 'metabolised' into policy recommendations, legal actions or campaigns. This frames future conversations with policy-makers and offers a round-up of the evening (or what Boal called 'the match report'). Over Boal's four year term, 13 laws and many more campaigns, lawsuits and organisations were formed directly from this technique (1998).

Since this first experiment in Legislative Theatre, it has been attempted all over the world. However, the extent to which these other experiments have effectively influenced policy is debatable. The unique position Boal had as *vereador* is difficult to recreate and many other experiments have lacked the political support and legitimacy needed to enact successful Legislative Theatre in terms of policy influence.

As part of this thesis, I have interviewed many of the practitioners involved in creating this kind of work. For example, Iwan Brioc who led on the project, *Rehearsals for Reality,* with Theatr Fforwm Cymru in 2002. This project was supported as part of the opening of the new, devolved, Welsh Assembly and aimed

to present "a real innovation in how we approach policy development in Wales" (Theatr Fforwm Cymru, 2002). *Rehearsals for Reality* worked with 15 separate community groups all over Wales on a wide range of issues from mental health provisions, to women's economic development. Each was trained in TO techniques and created a Legislative Theatre piece which was performed and metabolised in the Agora, right on the steps of the Welsh Assembly, over the course of a 3 day festival. *"…what we were trying to do with Rehearsals in Reality was change reality. For me that is the gold standard in what TO should be. Crossing the fourth wall and effecting a change: making reality*" (Iwan Brioc, former Co-Director of Theatr Fforwm Cymru, interviewed 02.03.2018). However, despite its proximity and prominence, the project struggled to get policy-makers to attend the events, and it was felt that the policy influence of the performances was limited.

The significant limitations to engaging directly with formal politics also arose in my interviews with practitioners, and, as I shall examine in later chapters, constitutes a major barrier in the role of participatory theatre as democratic space. For example, a number mentioned a frustration with the "*implicit assumption that our legislators are any fucking good and that they are going to fucking do something about it"* (Adrian Jackson, Artistic Director and CEO of Cardboard Citizens, interviewed 26.02.2018). This was not only in terms of achieving policy change, but in the ineffectiveness of implementing policy change once it had been passed. This is a significant limitation to the practice of participatory theatre as democratic space, and is one which is explored in detail in relation to my case studies throughout this thesis.

To focus solely on policy impact within political efficacy would be to miss other significant forms of political efficacy present within participatory theatre. Awareness raising, in terms of offering both information and a better emotional understanding of an issue, has always been a key element of political theatre generally, and participatory theatre specifically. For example, in an article defending the much-derided 'agitprop'[33] of the 1960s and 1970s, Rebecca Hillman (2015) argues that it is "possible to comprehend agitprop as inherently

[33] Standing for 'agitation propaganda'. The term is primarily associated with Communist or Socialist communications, including posters, publications and theatre. In this thesis I am only referring to agitprop as a form of political theatre.

complex…in terms of its ability to transform political and economic structures into concrete visual images", in an attempt to "develop in audiences an understanding of how their different, lived experiences relate to and are affected by social, political, and economic forces" (Hillman, 2015). Hillman argues that this kind of political theatre offers a means by which to raise awareness and understanding of an issue. These types of political theatre act as the beginning of a conversation –which are often continued in the form of a post-show discussion in these instances, but also, perhaps, led audience members to find out more, or become more politically active outside the space. For example, Hillman (2015) speaks of audiences who attended agitprop performances who "have claimed the project's impact on their involvement with Occupy London and various campaign groups and trade union initiatives" following their attendance.

In the participatory theatre practice explored in this thesis, awareness raising takes on a slightly different form and is more dependent on participation and exchange within the audience. As the audience become spect-actors, or participants, the knowledge and emotional realities of the issues explored in the piece are exchanged between them, rather than *from* the stage *to* the audience. They are part of the action and through the exchange of ideas and creation of the work, information and emotional relationships to this information is transferred. This will be addressed in greater detail in specific relation to empirical work of this thesis in chapters 5 and 7.

It is important to note here that the act of raising awareness through the arts has also been a subject of moral debate. Despite the emphasis on 'opening up conversation' and 'helping audiences to question further' (Chou & Bleiker, 2013; Hillman, 2015), agitprop theatre begins from a politically bias starting point, and use narrative, imagery and emotional techniques to persuade their audiences of this perspective. For Plato, who derided the arts as: 'an imitation of an imitation, which can tell us nothing about truth' (Plato, [375 BC] 2003, pp. 240-248), this makes art and theatre a dangerous form of political discourse. Plato argues the emotional hold art can have over its audiences is a powerful and dangerous tool which 'has a terrible power to corrupt even the best character, with very few exceptions' (Plato, [375 BC] 2003, p. 349). He had a strong normative approach in the division of the 'rational' as a higher capacity, which should be celebrated and cultivated, and the

'emotional' (which he associated with art) as being a lower capacity, which should be suppressed and overcome in order to reach true knowledge or enlightenment. He argued that the arts appealed to our emotional capacities in ways which were highly convincing, but appealed only to our irrational tendencies ([375 BC] 2003, pp. 336-353). As addressed in chapter 2, a hierarchical division of emotional and rational tendencies are problematic misguided – both in terms of politics and our current understanding of human psychology (Johnson-Laird & Oatley, 1992; Nussbaum, 2013; Okin, 1989).

However, Plato's claims for the highly persuasive nature of art and its recurring misuse for political ends are more convincing. The use of art in propaganda is the most obvious example of this 'corrupting' power of art. Belfiore and Bennett (2008), and Nato Thompson (2017) draw on the use of art within the rise of Fascism and Nazism in the 1920s and 30s to illustrate. Both Mussolini and Hitler saw the arts an important political tool with which to garner wide public support for their political projects. A key aspect of this was the attempt to make people *feel* a certain way – e.g. fear and hatred towards the enemy, love and respect for the nations' leaders – in the hope that this may underpin their political support for the regime. This moral query regarding the emotional power of the arts in relation to politics is addressed in chapter 5 in relation to the importance of emotions within *Cathy* and Theatre of the Oppressed.

Another key aspect of the political efficacy of participatory theatre is its potential role as a form of activism *in itself* – thereby contributing to participants' sense of political confidence, or citizenship. This is not the case for all participatory theatre projects, however, as explored above, a significant portion of participatory theatre projects have explicitly political themes, and/or objectives. The active role audiences play within these performances invites them to contribute to this agenda. Their involvement in the action of the performance also becomes an act of involvement in political discourse. For example, practitioner and academic Liselle Terret writes on a performance project she facilitated with a group of disabled young adults in 2005- 2006. Through a series of reflections with some of the members of this group she explores the important political role this project had for those taking part. The second performance they enacted was entitled *Who's Got the Power,* and was a kind of Forum Theatre piece performed for "the Mayor of

this London borough, residential care managers and others who work in the care industry" (2009, p. 340). One performer commented: "We made it especially for the AGM because we wanted to show them that, given the chance, special needs people have more of a voice than they originally think", and another commented: "It was important for the audience who watched it because they could see what those people go through everyday… It was important for me to perform in it because I wanted to have the power" (ibid). Regardless of whether this piece had policy influence, raised awareness, or motivated action outside the theatre space, for those taking part, this piece was a form of political action in itself, in which they saw themselves as political actors with an important message to communicate.

This example demonstrates the political significance for those participating in the creation of the piece. Within participatory performances, this activist role is also extended to the audience. For example, the Legislative Theatre performances of Theatre of the Oppressed New York City (TONYC) have become a key opportunity for a broad range of citizens to engage with campaigning and policy-making around local political issues: "You might not be the kind of people who goes to the [council] office but these are the people of New York City... It's powerful. It gives everyone a good feeling, like they were included in the vote." (Newbigin, 2018, p. 9). Regardless of the political efficacy in terms of policy influence and political literacy, the act of taking part in political discourse as an activist or citizen is a crucial political act within any democracy.

3.4 Arts advocacy, instrumentalism and the intrinsic value of the arts

With this thesis, I aim to contribute to the exploration of the social role of the arts, and, as such, it is important to articulate my position in relation to arts advocacy and instrumentalism – two significant and recurring challenges within this field of study.

The first challenge is a tendency toward 'arts advocacy': that is, research whose primary aim is to advocate for the arts. These studies and publications seeks to justify funding for the arts which, "instead of questioning whether or not the arts actually do have the economic and social impacts claimed for them, researchers have directed their efforts to coming up with evidence that they do" (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, p. 7). This is closely linked with highly competitive funding

structures which demand near constant justification through vague and centrally determined goals such as 'excellence' or 'economic impact' (Hesmondhalgh et al., 2015, p. 91). Whilst the demand for the social and moral justification of public arts funding is nothing new (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008), under the New Labour Government (1997-2010) there was a rise in "social instrumentalism, where culture was only defined in a policy context in terms of a supplement to social or urban policy aspirations" (Vickery, 2007, p. 2). During the subsequent Conservative-led governments there was a period of major public sector cuts and austerity[34], which intensified the need for constant justification and auditing of public funding for arts and culture, and reinforced a demand for the DCMS to achieve 'value for money' (Hewison, 2014).

Therefore, it is perhaps not surprising that there has been an increase in research whose primary aim is to make the case for the social and economic importance of the arts, at times with dubious methodological approaches and widely contested definitions of 'impact' (Hewison, 2014, p. 124). The requirement for justification has become a self-fulfilling prophecy: targets need to be met, so they are. This is demonstrated by the fact that public resource distributions have not changed much as a result of the evidence provided (Neelands et al., 2015). The arts organisations and projects often making the strongest claims for the social impact still remain those which struggle the most for adequate funding. However "the recipients of the largest grants, which account for a very substantial portion of the available funding, have pretty much remained the same as they were in Keynes' times" (Belfiore, 2012, p. 107).

The self-fulfilling and theoretically-thin nature of industry evaluations and arts advocacy publications is something I became aware of whilst working as a theatre-maker in the UK. Securing highly competitive, small pots of funding is dependent on claims of social impact, yet there is little guidance or continuity within the sector on how to evaluate or understand this social impact. Furthermore, given the competitive and limited funding sources available, failure is generally not

[34] "…the Coalition's first Comprehensive Spending Review (October 2010) reduced the DCMS budget by £400 million by 2014/15. This meant a 29.6% cut for Arts Council England…" (Hewison, 2014, p. 163).

acknowledged or investigated[35]. As I shall elaborate on in chapter 4, from my perspective within the industry, this meant that claims of success were rarely questioned. Herein lies a key motivation for this research – when deciding to undertake this research I sought to better understand the opportunities and limitations of participatory theatre in relation to democracy, in a way that sat outside the need to justify funding, or prove social value for commissions and partnerships. An aim of this research has been to unpick and understand these opportunities and limitations in order to contribute to notions of 'best practice' within the genre of participatory theatre and alternative approaches to participatory democracy.

This relates to the second challenge: the long-standing debate between the intrinsic and instrumental value of the arts. There are issues with the premise of the question of social and economic impact, which runs deeper than methodological concerns. Many arts organisations, artists and theorists have reacted strongly against the increased demand for measurement and evaluation, arguing that it reinforces an acutely instrumental approach to the value of art. This has been a recurring criticism of the participatory and community arts practice spoken of above, and of the theatre work related to this field. The argument is that this approach to creating theatre overemphasises theatre as a 'tool' to be used to achieve other goals. To place emphasis only on the process and not on the aesthetic quality of the artwork itself, can devalue the entire project. For example, John Tusa (then managing director of the Barbican Arts Centre) argues:

> …such considerations contribute nothing towards the only thing that matters – the quality of the arts. We have to be far more robust in rejecting skewed indicators, distorted objectives and fallible targets which contribute nothing to the central purpose of the arts (2007, p. 55).

The 'central purpose of the arts' in this instance is an aesthetic one – an intrinsic value, which is hard (if not impossible) to describe or measure. This relates to the commonly named 'arts for arts' sake' position: a Kant-inspired argument that we should view art as an end in itself and not as a means to an end.

[35] This is a theme explored through the AHRC-funded FailSpace project led by Dr Leila Janocvich and Dr David Stevenson (Jancovich & Stevenson, 2019; Jancovich, 2020).

This debate has largely been left behind in the literature in the UK more recently – it is fundamentally a debate with no fixed solution, and whilst it is important to be aware of the arguments, there can be little resolve. In exploring the potential role of theatre practice within democracy there is a high risk of instrumentalisation of theatre: in seeing its value purely in its ability to achieve political ends. This is a risk I am aware of throughout this thesis. There are two outlooks which inform this research and address this concern in the analysis of my empirical case studies. The first is an explicit acknowledgement throughout this research that any potential value participatory theatre may have in terms of creating democratic spaces is one of many potential values. As I shall expand on in chapter 4, neither of the case studies explored in this thesis were created with the purpose of creating a democratic space. Although both did have political intentions, the theatre companies primarily intended to create engaging, provoking and beautiful pieces of theatre. The extent to which they created a democratic space was an unintended, albeit useful, side effect.

The second acknowledgement which relates to the dangers of instrumentalisation in this thesis has emerged from my empirical work. In delving into the ways in which participatory theatre might create democratic spaces it became clear that, in many instances, the elements of the case studies which made them successful pieces of theatre, were the same features which made them useful democratic spaces. As will be demonstrated in chapters 5-7, the aesthetic, the emotional impact and the liminality of the work are all key in creating engaging, provoking and beautiful work – yet it was also these same qualities which contributed to their role as useful democratic spaces.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to clarify my use of the term participatory theatre. Whilst it is used to define multiple practices, in this thesis I am using the term to refer specifically to practice in which the audience participates in the performance of the piece – their participation is crucial to the performance of the piece. Much of the literature pertaining to participatory theatre, and participatory arts more generally, focusses on the participatory nature of the creation of the piece (and the extent to which it is meaningfully participatory or community-led). This thesis

differs from this approach by focussing primarily on the context of the performance itself, rather than its development.

I have also sought to address why and how participatory theatre may be a practice worth examining in relation to creating useful democratic spaces. From past studies, both from within various academic disciplines and from within the arts sector, there is evidence to suggest that participatory theatre may have a useful role to play in creating democratic spaces. This literature suggests that participatory theatre can offer distinctive opportunities in terms of creating environments with multiple approaches to political expression, beyond exclusive forms of rational discourse. Flinders and Ryan (2018) suggest that there is value in the liminal quality of participatory theatre in terms of facilitating democratic listening. There are clear overlaps between the need for imagination in democratic spaces and the crucial role imagination plays within participatory theatre. Dewey ([1934] 2005) draws attention to the historic role the arts have played in building a sense of collectivity, which is central to facilitating a discourse on the common good. The practice of Legislative Theatre, as well as (to an extent) agitprop portray the potential political efficacy of theatre practice. However, the literature also offers evidence for potential limitations to this approach, particularly in terms of inclusivity and political efficacy – which will be given further attention in later chapters in relation to the empirical work of this thesis. Albeit with these limitations, participatory theatre seems to be well situated to play a role in addressing the neoliberal threat to democracy, through the creation of useful democratic spaces.

Overall, this thesis aims to address a gap in the literature by investigating the potential role for participatory theatre in encouraging and facilitating democratic participation. In this, and the previous chapter, I have aimed to do this by bringing together relevant theoretical arguments from multiple disciplines including Political Theory, Theatre Studies and Cultural Policy. The remainder of this thesis will address this agenda more fully with empirical analysis. This chapter has sought to show that there is a clear historical and theoretical precedent demonstrating a significant relationship between democracy and participatory theatre. The work is now to test this theory in the field, with specific reference to two contemporary pieces: *Cathy* by Ali Taylor and Cardboard Citizens, and *We Know Not* by METIS.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter will explain the methods I employed in this thesis in terms of the collection and analysis of my data, as well as the ethics at play in this endeavour. It is grounded in the theoretical work of chapters 2 and 3. It also aims to explain the research approach I have taken in this thesis, which has framed the theoretical work of this project, my normative position, and my empirical fieldwork.

I have approached my research questions through an extensive literature review, which emerges throughout the thesis, but is the particular focus of the previous two chapters. I have also conducted empirical research in the form of two in-depth case studies. My approach to this empirical work is the primary focus of this chapter. The first case study was conducted with Cardboard Citizens on their production of *Cathy*, the findings of which are explored in chapters 5 and 6, and the second was with METIS on their production of *We Know Not What We May Be*, which is the focus of chapter 7. As addressed in Chapter 1, the imbalance between the two case studies is due to the historical and artistic context of *Cathy* (as a Legislative and Forum Theatre piece), and that the piece had already untaken two national tours. It is not a reflection of varying significance to this research. To re-state, the research questions for this thesis are:

Primary

- Can participatory theatre create a useful democratic space?

Secondary

- Is there anything distinctive about participatory theatre as an approach to creating democratic spaces?

- What are the limitations to this approach to democratic spaces?

As aforementioned, the focus on this thesis is not the aesthetic value of the productions studied, nor the theatre companies: the specific object of

analysis in this thesis is the audience's participation and experience of participatory theatre – as a political event. I begin this chapter with a discussion of my research approach and how this has framed my desk research and fieldwork. I then turn to the research design of this thesis, exploring my chosen methods for data collection and my approach to data analysis. The empirical work of this project has been conducted via two in-depth case studies of two, very different, participatory theatre events. A section of this chapter is dedicated to exploring the structure and content of these performances, and a rationale for in-depth case studies as a methodology and why each of these pieces were chosen for this research. The final section of this chapter is devoted to a discussion and consideration of ethics.

It is important to note my positionality in relation to this inquiry. As mentioned in chapter 1 of this thesis, I have worked professionally within the theatre sector, and often specifically on participatory theatre projects, for the past 8 years. I have worked primarily as a theatre director, but also as a facilitator and performer. Therefore, a certain amount of the motivation for this research, as well as my perspective on the literature and empirical research, is based on my practical experience within the field. This positionality has afforded me unique access in terms of the case studies, and acquiring supplementary interviews with practitioners during this research, as well as a useful background understanding of the sector, which has enriched this study.

However, this positionality also comes with the risk of normative assumptions towards the success of theatre practice as a democratic space. In working in the field, there is a risk that I would naturally seek out its social significance. On this point, I wish to offer two recurring thoughts and feelings I have had toward this research. The first relates to my initial motivations for undertaking this study. Having worked in the sector for 5 years by that time, often rushing from one project to the next, always competing for limited funding, I had found that there was never space to reflect or properly evaluate the social and political value of the practice. As touched upon in chapter 3, the structure of the theatre

sector often demands the exaggeration and celebration of these social impacts (to get funding or partnerships with venues). I struggled with this discrepancy and the need for constant justification of the social value of my work, alongside a total lack of funding or time offered to really investigate this value, and this had led me to a stage of disillusionment with the work. This frustration was a key motivation in the decision to undertake this research project, and from the beginning it has been an opportunity for me, as a social scientist and a theatre practitioner, to better understand the value, and crucially, the limitations, of my theatre practice. To create useful work, it is crucial to understand what this kind of practice can *and cannot* do. The second recurring thought is that, as a practitioner, I have never been solely motivated by the social or political value of theatre. I did not come to theatre as an expression of my activism, although this has more recently become an important part of my practice. Nor have I ever believed that theatre is the best route towards social change, although I do believe it can play an important role. Like many of the artists I have interviewed and observed during this research, I chose to make theatre because I am motivated by the hope of making moving, interesting, imaginative and beautiful pieces of work. Significantly, a key finding of this research has been that it is precisely these aspects of theatre which can offer the most compelling arguments for its democratic relevance. Although, in my experience within the field they are often seen as separate aspects of theatre practice, for example, the intrinsic vs instrumental value of art debate referenced in the previous chapter.

4.1 Research Approach

In this thesis, I have adopted a critical theory approach, in which there is "an orientation where the researcher has a concern about social inequalities and directs her efforts toward positive change" (Berg, 2013, p. 210). Overall, my approach is one which acknowledges that "we cannot understand the nature of the practice without understanding its politics…" (Fenton, 2018a, p. 23). For this approach, the researcher must explicitly state what positive social change means for their research, as it

is explicitly aimed toward positive social change. Therefore, I must state my normative position clearly. This thesis begins from two normative assumptions:

1) That democracy is a positive force in society, particularly in terms of achieving an environmentally and socially just society. Therefore, democracy is something we should aim to protect and improve upon by increasing the depth and breadth of citizen engagement in their own self-governance.

2) That neoliberal rationality and neoliberal policies have been detrimental to democracy through the perpetuation of economic inequality, depoliticisation, individualism and the denial of alternatives, and there is an urgent need for change[36].

Critics of critical theory have argued that normative bias interferes with researcher objectivity and should therefore be avoided. This criticism is often fielded from a positivist perspective, which attempts to study and understand the social sciences with the same objectivity and distance of the natural sciences. They argue "only phenomena and hence knowledge confirmed by the senses can genuinely be warranted as knowledge" (Bryman, 2016, p. 24). A positivist approach is not appropriate for my research. The subject of my study is social and political, making the objectivity of tangible physical phenomena impossible. As Hay (2002) argues:

> …the most basic assumption of the natural sciences is that the rules of the game do not change…the nature of the 'economic' and the 'political' is different after Keynes and Marx in a way that the 'physical' is not after Newton or Einstein. (p.86)

From this perspective, it is irresponsible for social science to begin with

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[36] I would argue that since I commenced this research (January 2017), there has been a move away from neoliberal policy and rationality, and a rise in populist rhetoric within mainstream politics in the UK. However, as I shall argue in chapter 9, the threats to democracy and the ways in which these threats can be addressed through creating democratic spaces, remains both relevant and urgent.

the assumption of objectivity: in reproducing interpretations of the world as objective fact, the researcher can assume and reinforce social hierarchies of power and knowledge simultaneously. For example, in Victorian anthropological studies British social scientists of the day viewed African cultures as 'primitive' and 'uncivilized', and alongside these studies was the assumption that it was the role of the British to civilize and dominate these societies (Stocking, 1987). We now recognise these views as racist and colonialist, however, at the time these were straightforward, unchallenged assumptions and were reinforced by the research's 'scientific' weight and claims of objectivity. There is also interesting commentary on the clashes between objectivism and political perspectives in relation to how we approach democracy (Davies, 2019; Latour, 2013). This relates closely to the role of expertise, and claims of scientific objectivity in democratic discourse, which will be explored in chapter 6 of this thesis in relation to the role of expertise within the forums of *Cathy*.

In rejecting a strictly positivist approach to research, critical reflection of the researcher's biases must be carefully monitored. Within constructivist approaches to research and within critical theory, the importance of reflexivity is emphasised (Berger, 2015). Reflexivity, in this case, refers to critical self-reflection in terms of how the researcher's position and experiences may affect the research in terms of data collection, framing and analysis. Explicitly stating the normative position of the research, as well as any personal contextual factors which may influence the study, supports this reflexivity as it offers an indication to both the researcher and their readers of potential oversights and assumptions within her own work. For example, my position as a theatre-maker, often working in the field of participatory theatre, has significant relevance to this thesis. As explored in earlier chapters, this has relevance to why I chose this line of enquiry, and potential biases towards the political importance of theatre, as well as offering practical benefits such as unique access within fieldwork and practical understandings of the practice of participatory theatre.

I have taken a qualitative approach to this research (although this has been supported with quantitative data in relation to audience statistics). This approach has been selected as, through this research, I wish to understand "the social world through an examination of the interpretation of the world by its participants" (Bryman, 2016, p. 375). This thesis is focused on interactions between people: namely, their experiences of democratic spaces. Given this focus, qualitative approaches are better suited to this research, as this cannot be adequately examined through quantitative methods. When dealing with experience and social concepts like democracy, numbers cannot give us a complete picture. Qualitative research combines "multiple methodological practices, empirical materials, perspectives, and observers in a single study … as a strategy that adds rigour, breadth, complexity, richness, and depth to any inquiry" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 14). This collection method garners in-depth and rich data. I have chosen to explore two case studies in detail, therefore a primarily qualitative approach was best suited to my research design, as well as my research approach.

4.2 Overview and defence of selected case studies

I have chosen to conduct two, in-depth case studies for my empirical research. "With a case study, the case is an object of interest in its own right, and the researcher aims to provide an in- depth examination of it" (Bryman, 2016, p. 61). A case study is a detailed examination of a particular object, in this instance, I have chosen two participatory theatre productions, as contained events. A key critique of the case study method is that "they cannot provide information about the broader class" (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p. 3). In other words, that generalizable conclusions cannot be drawn from such a limited scope of inquiry. However, this critique assumes a positivist approach to research and knowledge production. The findings of this thesis instead attempt to answer a naturalistic generalization, which is to say that the in-depth investigation of these case studies, and the conclusions drawn from this data, will be applicable and useful to other, related investigations. "…what is

required of case study researchers is not that they provide generalizations but rather, that they illustrate the case they have studied properly, in a way that captures its unique features" (Ruddin, 2006, p. 806).

It is evident from the previous chapter that there are a wide range of approaches and contextual factors influencing participatory theatre practice, and each project (even when mounted by the same company) will have a unique relationship to democracy and democratic spaces. This is what makes the case study methodology particularly appropriate in this instance. In offering an in-depth account of two participatory theatre productions, this research is able to focus in on the specific elements of this practice, and how it may relate to democracy. Importantly, this method contributes to our understanding of *how* participatory theatre can create democratic spaces, and what may be distinctive about them, as well as *if* they can.

Case studies, as a research design, allowed me to spend time with each company in the lead up to the public production, during the performances and via follow-up meetings. These opportunities for data collection allowed for rich insights into the aims of the company and how they hoped to achieve them. The relationships developed with each company also allowed me access to the artists creating the work, multiple opportunities for participant observation during the performances, as well as the company's support in recruiting audience members for interviews (which will be discussed later in this chapter). This access would not have been possible without these relationships being built over time, which the case study method allowed.

How case studies are chosen is of utmost importance. There are two case studies of theatre projects in this thesis, each with very different approaches to creating participatory theatre. By exploring two, distinct, approaches to creating participatory theatre, I aimed to build a more representative account of participatory theatre practice in the UK today. This thesis is not intended as a comparative analysis. The variations in

approach have been useful in exploring my research questions and understanding the various techniques used within participatory theatre practice. In choosing these variant approaches to participatory theatre I aim to offer a naturalistic generalization for a broader range of participatory theatre as it is practiced today. I am examining these case studies in relation to creating democratic spaces, with the theoretical underpinning that the creation of useful democratic spaces will assist in the creation of broader sustainable prosperity, as outlined in chapter 1. I will now offer an overview of each of my case studies and a rationale for why each of these productions were chosen for this research.

4.3.2 *Cathy*, by Ali Taylor and Cardboard Citizens

Cardboard Citizens is one of the world's leading Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) companies, and is the oldest in the UK, founded in 1991. The artistic director, Adrian Jackson, translated most of Augusto Boal's books into English and the company regularly delivers training in TO methods to practitioners all over the world. The work of Cardboard Citizens focusses specifically on issues faced by homeless and vulnerably housed people living in the UK. The creation of their work always involves those with lived experience of homelessness – from deciding on story-lines, to the casts of their professional touring productions.

For this thesis, I focussed on their recent production of *Cathy* by playwright Ali Taylor and Cardboard Citizens, as well as their accompanying *Priority Needs* workshops and *Citizens Do* campaign. Inspired by Ken Loach's ground-breaking film *Cathy Come Home*, Ali Taylor's piece depicted a modern day Cathy – a single mother living in London, struggling with zero hours contracts and facing eviction. *Cathy* was originally created as a Forum Theatre piece, however, very early in its development it was established that the issues faced by Cathy and her daughter required policy solutions. It was agreed that within the forum there should be specific engagement with potential policy action. There was a feeling within the company that "*we've got a great play that tells the true story and there is room for forum – but it needs to do more*"

(Adrian Jackson, Cardboard Citizens). Therefore, the first tour (2016/17) was conducted as a Legislative Theatre piece.

It is important to note that *Cathy* was not initially planned as a Legislative Theatre project. Therefore, unlike the examples mentioned in chapter 3, the project did not include lawyers or policy experts to translate spect-actors interventions and discussions into clear policy recommendations ('the metabolising cell'), nor did the project involve specific politicians from the beginning. On the one hand this meant the project was flexible and allowed for a huge range of suggestions on a broad range of political issues (from housing to social care). It also allowed the project a great deal of freedom to pursue the various suggestions which came up from audiences and, as such, 646 laws/policy suggestions were collected over the course of the tour. These were analysed by the company and 5 common themes were highlighted. These 'Top 5 Cathy Laws' were presented at the House of Lords and at the Labour Party Conference in 2017. However, without specific policy targets and specific involvement from key policy-makers it is more difficult to articulate the direct policy impact of *Cathy,* or take forward the suggestions with key lawmakers. The policy impact of this piece is explored in greater detail in subsequent chapters of this thesis.

The second national tour of *Cathy* was not Legislative Theatre, but a Forum Theatre version. Alongside this tour the company ran the *Citizens Do* campaign. The staff of Cardboard Citizens aimed to ensure that audiences followed-up on the ideas they presented within the forums in the weeks after seeing *Cathy.* At the end of the forum, audiences suggested actions they personally could do and signed up to be a part of the *Citizens Do* campaign. As part of this campaign, those who signed up received weekly emails with suggested actions (many of which came from audiences themselves over the course of the tour). For example, buying the Big Issue or donating to a food bank.

> *Remember us? We listened to you, collected your ideas and now is the time for you to take action in your community. Your eight week journey of actions to make a difference to those affected by*

> *homelessness starts now. The experiment starts here.* (text from the first *CitizensDo* email, May 2018)

Over the course of the tour 1270 signed up for the campaign emails. Based on survey data, an estimated 44% of those who signed up did not attend a *Cathy* performance, but heard about it through friends or social media.

The *Priority Need* workshops were designed to support the implementation of the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017), which was released and enacted during the two national tours of *Cathy.* They were delivered to local authorities and relevant third/public sector organisations (e.g. Domestic Abuse services and General Practitioners). In these workshops a highly abridged version of *Cathy* was performed – focussing in particular on dealings the protagonist had with local authorities. A forum followed which focussed on these dealings and how they may be effected by the new legislation. I attended two workshops with Hackney City Council (28.02.2018).

Cathy was chosen for this study for two main reasons. The first is the form it took: it offered a rare example of both Legislative Theatre and Forum Theatre. In terms of thinking about the political role of theatre, Legislative Theatre (LT) is significant – unlike almost any other approach to theatre, LT approaches theatre as a space for formal policy-making *in itself*, rather than (the more common perspective) a campaigning tool. It is very rarely attempted in the UK. Secondly, Theatre of the Oppressed, and particularly the renowned work of Cardboard Citizens, is emblematic of the genre of participatory theatre – particularly in terms of its political role. It was of useful for this research to choose Theatre of the Oppressed as a genre, given its exemplary status within the field (as explored in chapter 3), and Cardboard Citizens as a company given their prominent role in the genre both in the UK and globally.

My positionality should be acknowledged in relation to Cardboard Citizens. I trained as a Theatre of the Oppressed facilitator with the

company and have worked for them on an ad-hoc, freelance basis since 2015 – delivering workshops and residencies within hostels and with housing associations. I had no involvement with their production of *Cathy,* although I have worked with a number of the artists who created the piece. My relationship with the company meant I had significant access to the staff of the company, as well as their support in recruiting interviewees, accessing survey data and their audience statistics. Whilst my 'insider' role may lead me to biases toward the company, it has also meant I have been able to collect a broader and richer data for this research. My involvement with *Cathy* was purely as an external researcher, and I attended performances and began interviews during the second tour of the piece in 2018. My research had no influence over the development, approach or content of the show.

4.2.2 *We Know Not What We May Be* by METIS

METIS describe themselves as "a performance arts company who create interdisciplinary performance projects that invite citizens to consider and tackle contemporary challenges facing our society" (MetisArts, 2020a). Their work often blurs the boundaries between different artistic mediums and, in the case of their more recent work, is highly participatory for the audience. The company is led by Zoe Svensden, who, alongside her work with METIS, works as a researcher and lecturer at Cambridge University. A key method which underpins the creation of all of their work is 'research-in-public': "a new way of making work which makes visible to the public as much of the research process as possible" (MetisArts, 2020b). At times this has taken the form of workshops in which the company hosts conversations and tests different interactive elements of the piece. This, in turn, gathers insights for them to continue to develop their work. At other times it may be a more formal conversation between Zoe Svensden and a thinker relevant to the piece the company are making. Rather than having these conversations behind closed doors, audiences are invited to listen and join in the exchange. Through their 'research-in-public' methodology, the process of making work also becomes somewhat participatory,

however, as stated in chapter 3, this research focuses on the performances, rather than the development process.

We Know Not What We May Be was performed at The Pit Theatre at the Barbican Arts Centre from the 5th-9th September 2018. It was produced by Artsadmin. It was a durational piece and audiences arrived every hour for their 'shift' – but were welcome to stay within the installation for as long as the installation was open (roughly 6pm-10pm every evening, from 2pm-10pm on Saturday/Sunday). The piece was named after a line in *Hamlet:* in Scene 5, Act 4, Ophelia says: "Lord, we know what we are, but we know not what we may be" (Shakespeare, [1603] 2011). This piece was built around the idea that the future is unwritten and can be shaped by current ideas, acts and decisions. Although the piece was not explicitly about climate change, in various conversations, Zoe Svendsen explained that all of her work is made 'in the context of climate change'. It was a focus for the creators in their construction of the piece, which was, in turn, highly influential in terms of the content of *We Know Not*. I will go into further detail about the nature and audience journey of the *We Know Not* in chapter 7.

I attended workshops and had regular conversations with Zoe Svendsen from January 2018 to November 2019 – with particular frequency in summer 2018. I was introduced to Zoe Svendsen by a mutual colleague and my background as a theatre maker was helpful in gaining access to the company. It was felt that this positionality would ensure that my time with the company, alongside being an opportunity for me to gather data and context for my research, would also be useful for their development of the show. In part, this was through gathering exit interviews and sitting in with participants on workshops to observe how they engaged with the installation. The feedback and exit interviews conducted at early test performances and workshops was fed back to the company (anonymously and with participants' permission), which in turn supported the development of the piece. In other, more subtle ways my contribution was through my regular conversations with Zoe Svendsen, which invited her to reflect upon her work as she designed the piece.

My influence on the development of the piece is difficult to fully unpick. Given that I was involved in its development from a relatively early stage, it is possible that some ideas from my research influenced some aspects of the content or approach of *We Know Not.*

As a case study, METIS' *We Know Not* provided a sharp contrast to Cardboard Citizens' *Cathy.* In creating this piece, METIS was experimenting with a new form of participatory theatre, unlike the tried and tested TO methodology employed in *Cathy.* It could be challenged in terms of its status as a 'theatre' piece: it was regularly described by the company and audiences as an installation or an event, rather than as a play or performance. They continue to see their work as 'performance arts' (MetisArts, 2020a) and all of the artists who worked on this piece are theatre practitioners, the venue chosen is a theatre and, despite pushing at the boundaries of the art form, its positionality as theatre is evident within the work. In using the term 'participatory theatre', METIS referred to the participatory nature of the event itself, rather than its process of creation, and it is highly divergent from the community theatre practice described in chapter 3 – the piece was not made with or for a specific community. Choosing a second case study with a highly distinct approach to participatory theatre allows for broader applicability for this research across the genre of participatory theatre.

Furthermore, the subject matter of *We Know Not* was highly relevant to this research. This thesis sits within The Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity (CUSP), and a guiding research question for CUSP is 'what does prosperity mean in a world of environmental, social and economic limits?' (Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity, 2020). This is remarkably similar to the task given to audiences in *We Know Not:* 'to work out who we might be in an alternative future, a future that creates a more just society, and in doing so averts runaway climate change' (MetisArts, 2020b). This conceptual link was useful in my research as it provided an opportunity to examine the role of theatre in creating forums to discuss political issues specifically related to sustainability and social justice which, as I shall

further explain in the concluding chapter of this thesis, has led to a whole new phase in my research.

4.3 Research Design

I have taken a triangulated approach to my empirical research; using multiple research methods in each case study in order that findings may be cross-checked. This has enabled a more substantive and reliable perspective on the practice of participatory theatre and its potential as a democratic space. With triangulation, each method serves to counterbalance the threats to validity present in each methodological approach (Bryman, 2016). In my fieldwork I gathered data through semi-structured interviews, reflective accounts, analysis of policy/company documents and participant observation. A small amount of quantitative data has also been used to support this research in the form of audience statistics included in company documents, which were cross-referenced with broader statistical evidence of theatre attendance from the Audience Agency 'Who Will Our Audiences' Be?' report and the Department of Culture, Media and Sport's 'Taking Part' survey (Pyle, 2019; Torreggiani, 2019).

4.3.1 Sample

My participant selection method varied depending on their role within the project, and between my two case studies. In each case study I had three broad stakeholder groups: 1) artists/producers involved in creation of the piece, 2) policy-makers/campaigners involved with production and 3) audiences. With both METIS and Cardboard Citizens, recruitment for artists/producers, and for policy-makers/campaigners involved was straightforward as these were small teams. For both case studies I worked closely with the company and conducted multiple interviews, as well as gathering my own reflective accounts of conversations and rehearsals. Introductions to policy-

makers/campaigners were made by the company[37].

For audiences, my recruitment process varied slightly between the two case studies. With Cardboard Citizens, I advertised the opportunity to be involved in this research through the performance venues mailing lists, over social media and via Cardboard Citizens' mailing list. During the second national tour of *Cathy,* Cardboard Citizens offered me two free tickets per tour venue for audience members willing to be interviewed. This greatly supported my participant recruitment and enabled me to reach participants in London, Sheffield, Kent, Cardiff and Glasgow. These participants were self-selecting and tickets were offered on a 'first- come, first serve' basis. The opportunity was shared widely by the host venues, the company and through my own Twitter and Facebook accounts. Using this method I managed to recruit participants whose experience of the company, participatory theatre, or even theatre in general, varied significantly (some were practicing theatre makers, whilst others rarely went to the theatre at all and were enticed by the offer of a free ticket). I also had the opportunity to interview audience members who had been specifically invited to the performances by Cardboard Citizens. Many tickets for Cardboard Citizens shows are offered to those who are currently/have been homeless, as well as those who work in the housing sector (within the third and public sector). Following introductions with some of these audience members I visited a homeless shelter and interviewed staff and residents about their experiences of *Cathy.*

For *We Know Not,* METIS organised a 'debrief area' for me to speak with audiences as they left the performance installation. This enabled me to conduct exit interviews with over a hundred audience members and capture initial responses to the piece – which greatly enriched my field notes. During these exit interviews I collected the contact details of

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[37] The companies were the gatekeepers to this stakeholder group, and it seems likely that they would only offer introductions to those policy-makers/campaigners who had positive experiences with the company. Therefore, the *range* of perspectives heard from this group (in terms of their belief in the political potential of the project) is limited.

audience members who were willing to take part in follow-up interviews and collected 60 contacts. Again, these participants were somewhat self-selecting. It was entirely optional to partake in the 'debrief area' and only a subsection of these participants were willing to be a part of more in-depth interviews.

4.3.2 Interviews

My primary data collection method in this research has been semi-structured interviews. 'Semi- structured interviews have a number of questions prepared in advance which are designed to be sufficiently open that subsequent questions can be addressed by the researcher in a careful and theorized way' (Wengraf, 2001, p. 5). My use of this method, particularly in relation to studying audience responses to theatre events, has been influenced by a technique known as 'Theatre Talks'. Theatre Talks was a method developed as a qualitative audience development technique in Stockholm. Within this methodology "the experiences of the participants forms the basis of the discussions" (Hansen, 2015a, p. 346). The focus is not about decoding or analysing the performance, but rather on the audience's experience ofthe piece. Theatre Talks has generally been used in focus group settings and begins with one primary question: "what was your experience of [name of theatre event]?" (Hansen, 2015b, p. 90). It has been a useful approach for this research as it emphasises the personal responses of the audience member, rather than a critical understanding of the form of theatre. Its core aim is to make audiences feel comfortable discussing theatre without necessarily being 'experts' in the field. As my research is not interested in the perceived artistic 'quality' of the theatre event, but rather the political experience and reflections of those involved (as artists, campaigners or audiences), this approach suited my aims. For a full list of my interview questions (which served as starting points for conversation), see Appendix 1.

The interviews were mostly one-to-one, although some were with two participants at the same time (used in cases in which one individual participant was nervous or uncomfortable being interviewed alone).

Most interviews were conducted in person, in public places or the offices of the interviewees, although some were conducted over Skype and each lasted roughly one hour. Overall, I conducted 30 semi-structured interviews (15 for each case study). I have ensured a range of stakeholder voices to gauge the expectations and ambitions of the artists/producers of the production; the perspective of policy-makers/campaigners involved in the project; and, most importantly for this research, to gain insights into the ways the audience experienced the piece and their reflections on this experience.

4.3.4 Quantitative data and policy documents

Cardboard Citizens offered me access to their audience statistics for their two national tours of *Cathy.* I was also offered access to survey results of an online survey conducted by Cardboard Citizens on their *Citizens Do* campaign which was launched alongside their 2018 tour of *Cathy.* There were 72 responses to this survey. Participation was self-selected and was encouraged through their mailing list and social media accounts.

Cardboard Citizens' audience statistics are in the form of a categorised account of demographic according to the Audience Agency's 'Audience Spectrum Profile'. The Audience Agency's 'Audience Spectrum Profile' system is widely used throughout the arts and culture sector and is encouraged by the Arts Council England. "Audience Spectrum segments the whole UK population by their attitudes towards culture, and by what they like to see and do" (Audience Agency, 2020). There are 10 different Audience Spectrum profiles which categorise audiences according to numerous factors including: educational attainment, income, age, race, habitation in urban or rural locations, and how often they generally attend cultural events. It is important to note that both companies invested significant time and money in reaching out to audience demographics who may not regularly attend theatrical events. The majority of attendees for *Cathy* were from the 'Metroculturals' segment – the segment most likely to attend theatre events. This segment are "confident and knowledgeable in their preferences, diverse in age and

background but united by their high-levels of education, well-paid jobs, liberal outlook and active lifestyles" (Audience Agency, 2020). The other largest audience group for *Cathy* was 'Kaleidoscope Creativity', who are a group with generally low cultural engagement. "A majority are council tenants… they are culturally diverse, but often economically challenged" (Audience Agency, 2020). These categorisations and Cardboard Citizens' Audience Agency data will be revisited in later chapters of this thesis.

METIS and Artsadmin (who produced *We Know Not)* have given me access to their audience statistics. However, rather than Audience Agency data, they offered (less detailed) numerical data for workshop attendance, as well as attendance for the performances at the Barbican from 'paying audience', 'young people/disadvantaged groups' (who were offered free tickets) and 'free tickets for previous contributors' (i.e. those who attended the workshops).

In terms of creating a useful democratic space, the frequent homogeneity of theatre audiences is a key issue and throws into question the inclusivity of this approach. Much has been written regarding the lack of diversity of participation in theatre – particularly in relation to the literature on 'cultural democracy' referred to in chapter 3 (Gross & Wilson, 2018; Neelands et al., 2015; Pyle, 2019). Both companies took care to ensure a diverse range of participants were included in the creation and performances of their work, and this is somewhat reflected in their audience statistics. However, for both, the largest demographic in attendance was regular theatre-goers, like 'Metroculturals'. Despite the efforts of both companies, their positionality as theatre brings its own barriers to engagement and necessarily effects the inclusivity of the space. This is a recurring subject of investigation throughout this thesis.

I have also been given access to the mission statements of both companies, scripts, meeting minutes (where relevant) and literature relating to past productions. For Cardboard Citizens, I have also analysed policy documents, including a Crisis Skylight report called 'Turned Away', which was made with support from Cardboard Citizens

members, the Homelessness Reduction Act and Cardboard Citizens' own lobbying materials including 'Cathy's Laws' which were presented at the House of Lords.

4.3.3 Participant observation and reflective accounts

I was an active participant within these projects: assisting background research, attending a range of associated workshops and, with METIS, the rehearsals for the production. This access enabled a two-way exchange between myself and the companies – for example, gathering feedback from workshop participants in an early test of *We Know Not,* helped the company to explore different aspects of the show during its development. As part of my participation, I took extensive field notes.

Field notes were gathered during workshops (associated with the performance or for the development of the piece) and performances for both *We Know Not* and *Cathy.* My field notes describe physical settings, verbal exchanges and audience interventions. As both case studies are examples of participatory theatre, field notes describing the nature of audience participation (how they interact and how they are guided to do so by the performance piece) are important to this research. For *Cathy*, this was primarily used to describe the spect-actor interventions and the visible/audible responses to these interventions. Within *We Know Not,* conversations were more intimate and it was more difficult to take notes during the performance. My participant observation in this performance was more oriented around the exit interviews (outlined above) in which I managed to speak with over a hundred audience members as they left the performance. I was also able to analyse the written content offered by the audience in the weeks after the performance. This was a key part of the audience's engagement with the piece and through this analysis I was able to explore the written dialogue between different 'generations' of audience members. This form of engagement is addressed in more detail in chapter 7 of this thesis.

The practice of taking field notes is an integral and problematic aspect of participant observation as the researcher is split between being an

active participant and making notes on events and comments. As Kalthoff notes "[Ethnographers] write down actions which they just observed a moment ago, or they write down from memory what they heard and saw, relying on brief, fragmentary notes" (2013, p. 273). The overwhelming nature of field notes and observation is how much information there is within the field: body language, details of location and interactions (both verbal and physical). Watching and taking notes on all these happenings, whilst also participating, is impossible. Therefore, going into the field I had a clear and concise notion of what information may be relevant to the research and a corresponding criteria for what actions the research will be observing. In this study the aims of my participant observation are:

-To identify participants for interview (particularly artists/collaborators working on the piece)

-To observe audience responses to the performance event and workshops (both in terms of their verbal response to the piece in brief conversations, and in terms of their participation within the action of the piece)

-To capture any immediate responses to the performance

As stated above, I have been an active participant in many of the workshops, rehearsals, meetings and performances in the development of both productions. Therefore, during this participation I kept a detailed account of my own experiences of the production, impressions and conversations I have had with audiences and artists. I have also kept a reflective account of my response to interviews immediately following these conversations. The aims of this method of data collection are:

- To monitor my own responses and potential biases (which in turn supports the data analysis phase of the research)

- To 'cross-check' data from participant observation and interviews with my own account of events.

4.3.5 Data Analysis

To analyse my data I have drawn on qualitative content analysis, in which

there is ‘an emphasis on allowing categories to emerge out of data’ (Bryman, 2016, p. 690), namely using a grounded theory approach, one of the ‘most widely used frameworks for analysing qualitative data’ (ibid. p. 572). Grounded theory was popularised by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and depends on an inductive approach to research, in which theory emerges through collection and analysis of data, rather than using data to prove or disprove an existing theory. "In discovering theory, one generates conceptual categories or their properties from evidence, then the evidence from which the category emerged is used to illustrate the concept" (p. 23). This is not to say there is no theoretical starting point for the data collection – this is needed to inform the questions the researcher chooses to ask and who the researcher decides to question. In grounded theory this starting point is open to alteration in light of emerging categories from empirical evidence. Furthermore, initial coding is open and not determined by theoretical framings.

Earlier in this chapter I also make reference to critical theory as an overarching research approach for this thesis. Whilst there may be tensions between these approaches, various theorists have suggested that they can be usefully combined as they share “commitment to fallibilism and the interconnectedness of practice and theory” (Oliver, 2011, p. 371, also see Hense & McFerran 2016; Scott 2005). Within my research critical theory and grounded theory play distinct roles. This project takes a critical theory approach in terms of its theoretical unpinning, as well as a commitment to openness in terms of the normative and political motivations of this thesis. Grounded theory features primarily in terms of my approach to data collection and the analysis of my empirical work.

Returning to grounded theory and the analysis of my data: my theoretical framework outlined in chapter 2, was established prior to conducting fieldwork, so that I could make informed choices for my case studies and design my methodology. However, this framework has also been responsive to categories and concepts which have emerged through the analysis of my data, and the theory referenced in chapters 2

and 3 was influenced by my fieldwork. For example, ‘imagination and a belief in alternatives’ became its own element of a useful democratic space following the analysis of my case studies as its importance became clearer. This amounted to a kind of ‘spiralling research approach’ (see below), which is necessary for a grounded theory approach to data analysis.

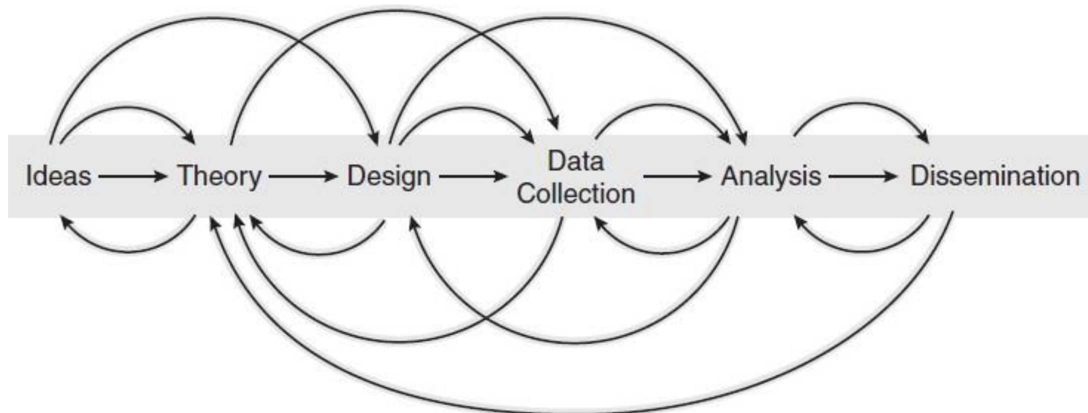

Figure 2: Spiral Research Approach (Berg and Lune, 2013, p.25)

The research methods described above (interviews, participant observation, and reflective accounts) produced a significant amount of data. Practically speaking, the first step in my analysis was to transform all data into typed text form: including creating transcriptions of recorded interviews and conversations; downloading policy documents/company documents and typing field notes. Interviews and conversations have been transcribed verbatim, including long pauses, ‘ums’ and ‘ahs’, as these can also be informative in regards to the tone of the interviews, and are included in all quotations from interviews in this thesis.

Using my reflections from the field and the data itself, I created a criterion of selection to consolidate and clarify my data. In this way, raw data was sorted by these emergent categories: identifying similar phrases, patterns, relationships and commonalities/disparities. This process depended heavily on a well organised coding system, for which I used NVivo software. My coding system for each case study is

included in appendix 2 of this thesis. There were three distinct steps in the coding of my data sets, informed by a grounded theory approach (Charmaz, 2006):

1) Initial coding: reading through all data and coding line by line. Codes remain short, simple and precise. Memos are a key aspect of this phase.

2) Focused coding: the most significant or frequent codes were drawn from the initial coding. "Focused coding requires decisions about which initial codes make the most analytic sense to categorise your data incisively and completely" (pp. 57-8).

3) Theoretical coding: in this phase patterns and frequent codes are related to theoretical framings. In this stage of analysis the researcher "moves their analytic story in a theoretical direction" (p. 63). In this research, within this phase my data was coded into a typology grounded in the five key elements of democratic space.

This process allowed me insight into the dominant themes of the data and, from this process, I have sorted my findings into four data chapters (chapters 5-8). Chapters 5 and 6 are focussed on Cardboard Citizens, chapter 7 is focussed on METIS and chapter 8 draws together the two case studies and explores overlapping themes emerging from the data. In each of these chapters I have employed a grounded theory approach, allowing the data itself to inform the focus of the chapter, however, each chapter also links the emergent themes of the data back to my theoretical framework and the five key elements of a useful democratic space.

4.5 Ethics

Ethics are an important consideration before commencing any fieldwork. I successfully gained ethics approval from the University Research Ethics Committee, as my research 'involved living human participants or the personal data of living human participants' (2016) in February 2018. This approval letter is in appendix 3 of this thesis. The major ethical considerations arising from this research have been, firstly, how

to gain informed consent to partake in the research and, secondly, how to safely store the personal data collected.

Ensuring informed and explicit consent was straightforward in terms of gathering interviews. In each session the participant's role within the research was clearly explained and written consent was given. All audience members have remained anonymous within this thesis, as well as some artists working on the projects who wished to be anonymous. The majority of the artists, company members and all policy-makers referenced in this thesis are named alongside their position, as this information is relevant to this research. All participants who are named within this thesis were also sent a complete draft one month before submission so that they had the opportunity to give final consent for their contributions.

Gaining explicit consent for participant observation was less straightforward. For this research I observed audiences and participants attending Cardboard Citizens' *Cathy* and METIS' *We Know Not What We May Be* and associated workshops. For the Cardboard Citizens performance I left information sheets in the auditorium on the audiences' seats. This sheet included my contact details, information on how to 'opt out', as well as an invitation to get involved in the research as an interviewee. No audience members contacted me to 'opt out'. All observations recorded (as explained above) are explicitly from the researcher's perspective. No names or personal information were used in the field notes. For *We Know Not,* there was no auditorium seating. However, audiences were given programmes: including a map of the installation and an invitation for a follow up event. Included in this programme was my contact information, an invitation for audiences to get involved in the research as an interviewee and a disclaimer that I was conducting fieldwork. The opportunity to 'opt out' was also clearly stated. Again, no audience members contacted me to 'opt out'. In all conversations I had with audiences as they left the event I clearly stated my position as a researcher. No personal information or names were collected for these field notes.

Another important consideration was privacy and data protection. According to University of Leeds Ethics Policy, the transcripts from interviews and focus groups are 'highly confidential' as they may include 'individual's racial or ethnic origin, political opinion, religious or other beliefs, physical or mental health or criminal record' (2016). My study complied with the data protection guidelines of both The Centre for Understanding Sustainable Prosperity and the University of Leeds' regiment that data be stored on an encrypted external drive and that a backup copy will be uploaded to the encrypted digital cloud (however, not within shared areas). Permissions were also gained for third party researchers to view data (supervisors and for peer consultation), who are all based at the University of Leeds (although Professor Kate Oakley subsequently moved to the University of Glasgow). Consent forms are classified as 'confidential' according to university policy and were stored in a locked cabinet at the University of Leeds after personally delivering them from fieldwork (to be destroyed after successful completion of research in 2020).

Chapter 5: Emotion and mood in *Cathy* by Ali Taylor and Cardboard Citizens

A recurring theme in every interview I conducted with audience members, regardless of how much time had passed since they had seen *Cathy*, was the emotional impact of the piece. The story tracks a single mother's journey to homelessness following an eviction from her flat in London, and her resulting separation from her daughter. One of the final scenes shows Cathy, now living on the streets, seeing her daughter again for the first time in months. It is a snatched meeting, Dani (the daughter) is going to meet her friends and she is clearly uncomfortable seeing her mother in this context. Dani has just received her results for her GCSEs and Cathy wants to hear her results again and again in order that she might memorise them as she does not have a pen and paper to write them down. The pride and love Cathy feels for Dani is contrasted with Dani's embarrassment and discomfort in seeing her mother this way. It is an affecting scene and as the lights come up after the curtain call a significant portion of the audience can be seen wiping away tears.

The emotional nature of *Cathy* is a necessary component of Forum and Legislative Theatre. The frustration, sadness and compassion the audience feels for Cathy's plight motivates interventions and discussion within the Forum. However, humour and a sense of playfulness also have a crucial role to play. Adrian Jackson, Artistic Director of Cardboard Citizens and director of *Cathy,* argues

> …the best Forum Theatre acts with a combination of *seduction* and *provocation…* so that, without coercion, they [the audience] feel an overwhelming urge to make their thoughts and feelings known by taking action; in the form of an intervention. (Jackson, 2009, p. 41 emphasis added)

The provocation in *Cathy* comes from the audience's frustration and sadness at the injustice Cathy faces throughout the piece. The seduction comes from Cathy's likability, her relatability and the moments the play makes you laugh, as well as from the Joker's approach to facilitating the forum – a crucial role with Forum and Legislative Theatre which is investigated in greater detail later in this chapter.

As mentioned in chapters 2 and 3 of this thesis, emotions have a significant role to play within democratic spaces, as well as being a central component of arguments for the political importance of art. Theatre theorist Helen Nicholson argues that "the political efficacy, morality and sensibility of theatre are predicated, one way or another, on the affective qualities of emotion, how they are caught and their effect on the actors and audience's minds and bodies" (2013, p. 20). The artistic quality here, as well as any potential political value, are both contingent on the play's ability to make its audience *feel* something, as intended by the artists who create the piece. "…we assume art has a deep affective and thus intrinsic value and these values are ends in themselves" (Vickery, 2006). As audience members, we expect to be emotionally affected by theatre performances. This is by no means a sufficient account for how we may judge the aesthetic or artistic quality of a theatre piece and it is not the intention of this thesis to assess artistic quality. However, this again demonstrates the frequent indivisibility between the intrinsic and instrumental aims of creating art (as discussed in chapter 3). The emotional impact of a theatre piece is a crucial component of creating both a successful artistic work and, as this chapter will show, is key to its role as a useful democratic space.

In *Cathy,* emotions (beyond their presence to serve a broader artistic purpose) provoke interventions and discussion; foster compassion; build a sense of collectivity amongst the audience, and encourage political change outside the theatre space. There were also other unintended, and potentially problematic, effects of the emotional nature of the piece, which risked undermining the quality of listening and the inclusivity of the space. In this chapter I will be examining the use of tragedy, mood, and humour as emotive techniques in *Cathy.* I argue that the highly emotional nature of *Cathy* was crucial to its political value, in that the emotional responses it evoked were key to the creation of a useful democratic space.

5.1 The technique of tragedy

For Aristotle, tragedy was defined by the evocation of fear and pity in the audience[38].

[38] Boal (1979) himself had great reservations of Aristotle's theory of poetry and theatre, which he saw as a coercive force used by the state aimed at the 'purgation of antisocial elements' (p. 46) to create model citizens. However, despite his reservations, I would argue that many Forum and Legislative Theatre performances predominately adhere to Aristotle's tragic conventions.

"Tragedy is an imitation of an action that is admirable, complete and possesses magnitude…performed by actors, not through narration; effecting through pity and fear the purification [catharsis] of such emotions." (Aristotle, [335 BC] 1996, p. 10). Almost every word within this passage has been the subject of significant philosophical inquiry. In this chapter I will first be focussing on Aristotle's notion of 'fear and pity' in terms of how it may relate to *Cathy*. Later on in this chapter I will also bring in the notion of 'catharsis', its use within *Cathy* and Boal's deep antipathy towards it. The fear is a fear that something like the situation being played out on stage may befall you, but also a vicarious fear for the protagonist and the unfortunate circumstances they face. The pity is for the suffering of the protagonist as a result of these hardships. "…the spectators are linked to the heroes, basically, through the emotions of pity and fear, because, as Aristotle says, something undeserved happens to a character that resembles ourselves" (Boal, 1979, p. 30)[39].

Plato, in direct opposition to Aristotle, was concerned about the potential political misuses of the emotional power of art. He argued it was a powerful and dangerous tool which "has a terrible power to corrupt even the best character, with very few exceptions" (Plato, [375 BC] 2003, p. 349). As explored in chapter 3, this is a recurring theme throughout the literature pertaining to the overlaps between art and politics – particularly in relation to the use of the arts and propaganda within the Fascist regimes of the 1930s (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008; Thompson, 2017).

The artists who created *Cathy* are explicit about its intention to stimulate certain emotional responses for a political end. For Forum and Legislative Theatre to function, its audiences must feel distressed at the protagonist's plight, so that they may be provoked into interventions within the forum (Jackson, 2009). Furthermore, the Theatre of the Oppressed, and *Cathy* as an example of this genre, is an explicitly political practice. Boal originally created this 'arsenal of techniques' for a Socialist revolution. These techniques were designed to support the oppressed in peacefully overthrowing their oppressors to realise a socially equal and just society (Boal, 1979). Whilst Cardboard Citizens is not focussed on driving forward

[39] There is significant philosophical debate around how and why we feel fear or pity when reacting to things we know to be fictions (Radford 1975, Walton 1978). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore these arguments, however, suffice to say that in this thesis I am working on the assumption that artistic expressions can and do evoke real emotional responses

a Socialist revolution, they are an active campaigning and lobbying organisation, with an explicit social aim: to end homelessness[40]. Although their aim is not revolution, they do work toward structural political change and are a successful campaigning organisation on this issue. In creating *Cathy,* Cardboard Citizens aimed to "*raise awareness and increase empathy for the issues around homelessness*" (Michael Chandler, Programme Director at Cardboard Citizens, interviewed 05.03.2018). Evidently, Cardboard Citizens uses the emotional power of art to progress a political project – therefore could *Cathy* be said to be an example of dangerous emotional manipulation for political ends, like the Fascist art projects of Hitler and Mussolini?

It does not follow that because art has significant emotional power, its use within all political projects is manipulative or politically problematic. The moral value remains with the political aims and does not extend to the use of art. To deride the use of art within political projects is fallacious: it is to criticise the tools used to achieve what may be a problematic goal[41]. Art can have great emotional impact, and that this power has been employed in support of morally repugnant political projects, like Nazism, does not mitigate its potential value in terms of more progressive projects, like the eradication of homelessness. There are clear normative foundations to many artistic projects, and the artists who create these works often have political positions which are expressed in their work, which in turn may have an emotional (and perhaps a political) impact on its audiences. The normative value of this work depends on the political goals, rather than the use of art and its emotional power.

Tragedy, and evoking 'fear and pity' in audiences, was a technique used by Cardboard Citizens in *Cathy* to create emotional responses and, not least, to 'provoke interventions' (Jackson, 2009). From my research it is clear that the

[40] Although their formal status as a charity means they cannot align themselves with any political party, their work has a clear socialist political tone.

[41] One may also criticise the instrumental nature of this treatment of art. The debate between the instrumental and intrinsic approaches to art have been discussed in chapter 3.

compassion[42] felt for Cathy, and the situation she faces in the play, provoked the audience to become spect-actors and get up onto stage to attempt to find ways of overcoming the oppressions she and her daughter faced. Within this piece there were two closely interrelated ways in which the audience responded to Cathy's plight. The first was compassion for the individual protagonists: Cathy and her daughter Dani, both of whom are complex, but predominately likable characters. They were relatable to many in the audience, and, from both my participant observations and my interviews, it was clear that the audience felt sadness and anger at the hardships they faced. The second response was moral outrage toward the broader systematic issues which led to these tragic situations. In this response, Cathy's tragedy was emblematic of wider social problems caused by real and current political failures related to housing policy and workers rights.

These two responses are reflective of the variant theatrical methods used in the two national tours of *Cathy.* It was initially toured as a Legislative Theatre piece, which intentionally draws the attention to systemic and policy issues within the forum, through discussion of policy changes. *Cathy* was then toured as a Forum Theatre piece (although with an accompanying campaign, *CitizensDo*), which is more focussed on immediate individual and small-scale changes which can be made.

To attempt to separate these two emotional responses is, at times, difficult. They are intensely connected and many audience members interviewed experienced them simultaneously. However, for the sake of clarity, in this chapter I will tease them apart, first exploring the compassionate response to Cathy as an individual, and the potential political issues this kind of response entails, before exploring the emotional response towards more structural issues. I will then briefly address the notion of catharsis as it relates to both the individual and structure emotional nature of the piece.

5.1.1 Blame and Compassion for Cathy and Dani

For some audience members, compassion for Cathy and her daughter was

[42] In this chapter I will be drawing on Nussbaum's (2013) definition of compassion as "a painful emotion directed at the serious suffering of another creature or creatures" (p. 142). She offers four conditions of compassion: (1) that the suffering faced is of a serious nature; (2) that the subject of compassion is not at fault (this problematic component of 'blame' will be explored in greater detail later in the chapter); (3) that the suffering is in some way relatable; and (4) that the subject of suffering corresponds to 'what we have invested as important in life, our conception of flourishing' (p.145).

provoked through the audience's direct association with the plot or characters of the piece, and it was this personal connection that promoted their compassionate response to the story. For example, some made personal connections to the action of the piece:

> *It was definitely something that I feel I could relate to in the sense that I grew up in a council estate with a single parent background. So it was familiar to me, and I knew people who had gone through very similar stuff – where they lost their job and couldn't pay the rent. Also trying to get help from the council and Citizens Advice and all that jazz. So it was very familiar. So watching it, like I could completely empathise and see where Cathy is coming from, because I'd seen it growing up.* (CA300518)

For this interviewee, that the play related to their own life experiences meant they could empathise with Cathy and the hardships she faced. Others did not necessarily link the plot of the piece to their own lives, but related personally to the characters in other ways:

> *And I kind of remember linking myself to Cathy. In that kind of context, probably because of those parallels – because of the sister conversation. I was just thinking: you think stuff like homelessness is so far removed from anything that could happen to me. But actually, I remember thinking in the days after the play that anything is possible.*
> *... I kind of had this weight of like fuck, anything could happen, this is a big decision!*
> (JMMCT130618)

To contextualise, Cathy goes to her sister for help when she is made homeless. However, after staying with her sister for a short time the relationship breaks down. They argue about the decisions Cathy has made in her life which have led to this situation. In this interview, the interviewee linked this scene to an episode in their own life which occurred a few days after seeing *Cathy,* in which they had a similar disagreement with their own sister about money and career decisions. This conversation reminded her of the play and she was again affected by Cathy's situation.

For others I conducted interviews with, their personal connection with the piece and

Cathy was through their work. Many audience members I interviewed worked with homelessness and housing issues in some way. For example,

> *…it gives you a greater sense of understanding for the people you are actually providing a service for. And I think especially for the staff who work in teams like development…and not on the front line dealing with customers and things like that, [means] you can become detached from it. So I think from a professional point of view it is important for people to see that this is the reality that people face… I think that you can quite easily forget that when you get up, walk to work, and you're sat behind a desk at a computer.* (HT090318 – this audience member worked for a housing association)

This was one of the aims of the *Priority Need* workshops which accompanied the *Cathy* project. As described in chapter 4, these workshops were for local authority staff and aimed to test ideas and provoke discussion around how best to support individuals in situations like Cathy and Dani. In particular, how the new policy around housing following the Homelessness Reduction Act (2017) might influence situations like this one, and how staff would deal with it.

These personal emotional relationships with the characters and the plot are key to Boal's philosophy: the original purpose of Forum Theatre was for the audience to have an opportunity to 'rehearse the revolution' (1979, p. 155) on a small and localised scale. This was also a key aim for Cardboard Citizens in creating the Forum Theatre version of *Cathy* – providing an opportunity to try out *"practical nuts and bolts of alternative ways of dealing with the situation*" (Terry O'Leary, Artistic Associate and Joker with Cardboard Citizens interviewed 05.03.2018). The utility of this purpose depends on those in the audience having some degree of relatability with the situations depicted on stage: i.e. that they would find it useful to rehearse alternative ways of dealing with landlords or housing officers, or how best to offer support to their service users, or approach tricky conversations with family members. As the quotes above demonstrate, for many in the audience, there were aspects of the piece which directly related to their lives and this rehearsal was of use. For Boal, and for the creators of this piece, this has direct social and political relevance because spect-actors can apply the learning they gain from the forum to

their lives outside the space. This may take the form of approaching a difficult conversation differently, or having a clearer technical knowledge of the legal process if you, or someone close to you, faces eviction. For the *Priority Need* workshops with local council workers, which accompanied *Cathy*, the forum provided an opportunity to test out and discuss ideas for how to best support those in similar situations to Cathy and her daughter.

However, for many in today's Forum Theatre audiences, the oppressions depicted on stage do not reflect much of their own lived experience. Frances Babbage writes, "the global expansion of Theatre of the Oppressed has created a situation whereby participants in sessions are no longer the socially disenfranchised, but relatively privileged" (2004, p. 63). This is problematic for Boal's original intentions for the technique as it runs the risk of reinforcing class hierarchy: the 'relatively privileged' spect-actor intervening and finding solutions to the plights of the 'socially disenfranchised' protagonists of the model.

As Sara Ahmed (2004) argues, this kind of invitation can instrumentalise the suffering of the powerless to elicit responses from the relatively powerful. Ahmed writes, "stories of pain involve complex relations of power" in which audiences can be "elevated into a position of power over others", in that they are in a position to offer compassion or give support (2004, p. 22). In this passage Ahmed is referring to the use of stories of suffering to elicit donations from a Western audience for a charity working in Africa. However, to an extent, this argument can also be applied to the depiction of Cathy and Dani's suffering for an audience primarily comprised of those without the lived experience of homelessness. Ahmed argues that when the suffering of others is used in this way "the pain of others becomes 'ours', an appropriation that transforms and perhaps even neutralises their pain into our sadness" (p. 21). The subject becomes the audience's reaction to the piece and their suffering as a result of witnessing the story, and it is no longer about Cathy's pain. Ahmed is also concerned that this kind of instrumentalisation of suffering, in which individual stories are offered as subjects for compassion, can decouple the individual's suffering from the structural and historic causes of this pain. The story becomes about the privileged saviour compassionately rescuing the powerless, but fails to acknowledge the role this privilege and power imbalance may play in the causes of suffering. This becomes particularly relevant to *Cathy* when considering

that the majority of the audience (37%) were 'Metroculturals', who likely had limited experience of homelessness or precarity.

This critique echoes Dobson's (2014) typology of different types of listening and their potential utility within political discourse. On the surface, the emotional experience of *Cathy* appears to enable 'compassionate listening', which Dobson describes as predominately one sided and therapeutic in nature (pp. 64). Whilst this type of listening has great use within psychotherapy, it is not suited to political spaces: "there is a problem when this is transferred to the socio- political context, and when listening becomes a balm to soothe the anxieties of citizens without changing anything in the circumstances that generate anxieties" (2014, p. 65). Arguably, this 'balm' soothes the audience in *Cathy.* The audiences' feelings of compassion offer a sense of virtue and these feelings themselves become a sufficient response and further political action is no longer required. As I shall argue later in this chapter, this is precisely the kind of 'catharsis' that Boal (1979) hoped to avoid through Forum Theatre.

This was also reflected in some of my interviews from the Forum Theatre tour, in which interviewees felt that to try and address small or personal issues only served 'to soothe anxieties without changing anything in the circumstances that generate anxieties'. *"I don't know what we think we can do with these little moments of kindness, I'm not suggesting otherwise, we should be compassionate, but if we want to change these things we need bigger change."* (SM200618)

I would argue that both of these potential critiques of the engagement of compassion, whilst relevant, cannot be fully applied to *Cathy*. Firstly, as demonstrated in the quotations above, for some in the audience this was an opportunity for a 'nuts and bolts' rehearsal for lived experience, as they had direct personal or professional experience of the events depicted on stage, e.g. tricky family relationships, eviction and precarious working conditions. An intended and prioritised audience for this piece were those with personal experience of the kinds of issues faced by Cathy – as demonstrated by the significant number of free tickets offered to those with experience of homelessness and those who work with the homeless, as well as their *Priority Need* workshop series (which were delivered exclusively to those working with the homeless and vulnerably housed). There were undeniably significant numbers of audience members for whom this did not

practically relate to their lives. However, in every performance I attended for this research those with personal experience of precarity and homelessness were present (sometimes in the majority) and very vocal within the forum. This will be explored in greater detail in chapter 6, when I examine the different types of expertise prioritised within the space. Secondly, unlike the charity appeals referenced by Ahmed, *Cathy* explicitly aims to portray the structural causes of Cathy's pain: for example, gentrification, austerity, gender issues and zero hours contracts. I will return to this defence and offer further detail in the section below.

Perhaps, for those audience members who could not personally relate to the suffering depicted, the piece offers an opportunity to relate more broadly to the emotional journey of the piece. Nussbaum argues this type of relatability is of particular political importance: "tragic spectatorship, emphasizing common human vulnerabilities undoes the lies involved in the segmentations produced by disgust… making it possible to extend concern beyond the dominant group" (2013, p. 262). Through depicting the suffering of someone who has a story totally unlike those in the audience, the play can extend the audience's emotional awareness of the suffering of others.

> *I don't think it's that the masses[43] don't care, it's that they don't know. Well, we know there are some who don't care and think the homeless should be shot. We do get those. But, actually I believe it's that they don't know. And until it touches you why would you know?* (CM010518)

In this interview, this audience member spoke of the importance of raising awareness of the processes by which people may become homeless. The interviewee believed that 'the masses', by which they meant those without an understanding of homelessness, or even those with a prejudice against the homeless, would have their minds changed through exposure to this kind of work, as they would gain a clearer emotional understanding of the experience. This

[43] 'the masses' is a loaded term, and it is useful to refer to the broader context of the interview in which this comment was made. This interviewee was a social worker who had worked within hostels and with homeless people for decades. Given the broader context of this quote, I believe that in using the term 'the masses' they are referring to those outside the sector, who have never had experience of homelessness or direct contact with those who have – in a similar way to a police person referring to 'civilians'.

audience member saw the play is a means of emotionally connecting people to the experience without them having to suffer themselves. The aim is, with this increased emotional awareness, audiences will alter their behaviour toward the homeless, as well as encouraging audiences to play a role in political campaigns related to this issue.

The issue with this argument is that, for the most part, those with a prejudice against the homeless are unlikely to attend *Cathy.* All of the audience members I interviewed attended the piece because they were already sympathetic to the issue (or indeed, workers within this field). This is something Cardboard Citizens is acutely aware of and the issue of how to draw in audiences who do not already have an interest in the issues surrounding homelessness was often discussed in my interviews with the company. However, despite its limited efficacy in persuading the prejudiced "masses", the majority of audience members interviewed spoke of a renewed or deepened sense of empathy and understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness. For example,

> *But after seeing Cathy, and the more time I have in my job, I now know that I can communicate with people… And it's never that I – I like to think I'm a kind and caring person, it's not that would never have previously – but I feel like I have the knowledge and to reach out to those people which I didn't have before.* (HT090318)

Some audience members also mentioned that they left *Cathy* resolved to act on the issue of homelessness:

> *Watching that show I left with even more of a sense of ideas to do this project and why it's important and just like Cathy needs to raise more awareness: not just in Newport not just in London but in the whole of the UK.* (CA300518 – this audience member was about to begin their own project to tackle homelessness in Wales)

And,

> *…it brought up the idea that it was nice to talk about stuff, but I wanted to actually change something… it was a turning point for my thinking – why don't we combine our skills together to make something happen here?*

(AM110418)

This suggests that the piece did have some impact upon personal political action beyond the theatre space due to the emotional impact of the piece. Many also spoke of the ways in which the piece had effected conversations they had subsequently had about homelessness:

Interviewee 1: I've had a lot of conversations about homelessness after it. I definitely talked to a lot of people about it/

Interviewee 2: /yeah – this is

true actually. Interviewer:

Conversations like what?

Interviewee 1: Well, just telling people what I'd seen – and that opens up a conversation about homelessness and I think it's something really present for people. As soon as you start talking about it with anybody, people are quite passionate and quite like/

Interviewee 2: /When you live in London, you see it everyday/

Interviewee 1: /yeah, everybody's got quite a lot to say about homelessness I think.

(MCTJM130618*)*

Overall, my interview data shows that audiences had a compassionate response to *Cathy*. They felt fear and pity for Cathy and her daughter's plight. For many this was due to a personal relationship with the experience of precarity, for others this was a more general emotional connection with the protagonists.

Before moving on to an examination of the emotional response to the structural issues presented in the piece it is also important to briefly address the role of 'who is to blame' in the context of tragedy, Forum Theatre and *Cathy*. The idea of the protagonist being predominately blameless is necessary to fulfil the Aristotle's tragic conventions and also for Nussbaum's (2013) definition of compassion. "Thus, Aristotle held that compassion for the hero of a tragedy views that hero as *anaitios:* not responsible for his downfall" (emphasis in original, p. 143). The blameless nature of the protagonist of *Cathy* is clear. Despite working multiple jobs,

whilst looking after her elderly father and supporting her teenage daughter through her GCSEs, Cathy's rent is tripled and she can no longer afford accommodation with any proximity to her work, her father's care home or her daughters' school. The extent of Cathy's blamelessness could serve to reinforce troubling and Victorian notions of poverty (the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor) and who is deemed worthy of public support.

This was reflected in an interview I conducted with a homeless person who, despite enjoying *Cathy,* felt that the subject matter (i.e. the plight of a single mother and her daughter) sought to portray a particularly sympathetic version of homelessness, which did not reflect their own experience: *"it was more to do to about homelessness of single parents than like actually being on the streets"* (ML010518). This was reinforced by the support worker from the same hostel:

> *Why, yet again, have we pulled the heartstrings because there's a child and not the real*
> *– um – picture of what it's like if you're a single non-priority? There was a lot of discussion here [at the hostel] over why that particular story was picked…* (CS010518)

Both of these interviewees felt that the piece had chosen a more sympathetic and blameless character – a hardworking single mother – in order to garner a more compassionate response to the issue. Overall, presenting Cathy as a predominately blameless character could promote problematic conversations which place a 'deserving' and 'undeserving' criteria on who should be entitled to public support.

However, for the most part, this was not reflected in my interviews or field notes. Whilst the audience members I interviewed commented on feeling sad for Cathy and Dani, her blameless quality mostly led back to the systemic issues which had placed her and her daughter in this scenario. In my interviews with the company, it was clear that the purpose of *Cathy,* like Loach's original *Cathy Come Home,* was designed to show that 'this can happen to anyone'. Cathy has a job, she does not have problems with addiction, and she has good relationships with her father, sister and daughter. This characterisation challenges the stereotype of who the homeless in the UK actually are. *"…because so many of our Members*[44] *have come from*

[44] Anyone homeless or those with experience of homelessness can join Cardboard Citizens as Members.

owning their own properties and being fully functional members of society, who happened to find themselves in that situation" (Terry O'Leary, Associate Artist and Joker on *Cathy,* interviewed 05.03.2018). This portrays a different rationale for Cathy's characterisation, in that at least part of the reason for her being portrayed as an employed, hardworking single mother, was to present the scale of the issue of homelessness.

However, the blameless quality of Cathy is arguably taken too far in *Cathy* as a Forum Theatre piece, in that it limits interventions. Some audience members, who attended the Forum Theatre tour (as opposed to the Legislative Theatre tour), felt there was no way to improve Cathy's situation through an intervention as she had done everything as she should or could have done – and that fundamentally it was the system which needed changing, not her decisions.

> *There was one guy in the audience, you know, ...he thought it was quite unfair that they were asking the audience to put themselves in Cathy's shoes and think of a different position for Cathy to take when actually that kind of puts the onus on the individual not to become homeless through decision that they make – when actually its more of a systemic thing that is causing her homelessness in that play.'... That's the thing, when I was kind of watching the second half [the forum] it felt like... it wasn't, I wasn't comfortable with, kinda, standing up in front of people 'I've got this alternative which is better' because I really didn't think there was one. (MCTJM130618)*

This quote draws out the potential issue of using tragic elements within Forum Theatre – if there is a sense of the protagonist as 'blameless', there is also little room for interventions and suggesting alternatives. However, beyond the specific plight of Cathy and Dani, the systemic issues which have caused their situation are repeatedly highlighted in *Cathy,* both within the action of the play and the subsequent forums. Indeed, the structural issues faced by the protagonists were the primary subject of discussion within the space and within my interviews. It is this perspective I will turn my attention to now.

5.1.2 Emotional responses to structural issues

Cathy's story within the play is depicted as emblematic of the many individuals

who are struggling with income precarity, gentrification and weak housing policy in the UK. This was reinforced throughout the piece, through the script, as well as the design and sound. For example, in each scene change there were recordings of real life Cardboard Citizens members speaking about their own journeys to homelessness, giving the sense of a chorus of voices who had similar experiences (a technique also used by Ken Loach in the original film, *Cathy Come Home).* Therefore, in the moments the audience felt compassion for Cathy, they were also made aware that this was only one of many real life stories happening in the UK currently. The structural and political nature of Cathy's suffering was particularly apparent in the audience's experience of the piece. For example,

> *If someone is in this condition in our society, the way things are organised means that if this happens, then this happens, then this happens. It's drawing a really clear line. That the system is set up to send people there – to send people on conveyor belts, or whatever you want to call it… It's systemic rather than individual and that's what Cathy does – it really shows that.* (JP200718)

Cardboard Citizens used a fictionalised account (portrayed as representative of real experiences) to demonstrate a wider social ill – explicitly demonstrating how it has been brought about by social inequality and injustice. Despite the fictional nature of the piece, that the play was based on real lives and performed by actors with experience of homelessness was often mentioned as a significant factor in the degree to which audiences were affected by the play.

> *I went to every single one [of the performances in their city] and told my family and you have to watch the live version because I really thought that it was theatre that it was so raw, and it wasn't make-believe, and it wasn't fiction that somebody had made up, this was about things that really do happen to people and performed by those who had awareness of things that were going on. Anyway, I'm still shocked.* (HT090318)

This heightened the emotional impact of the piece for many. It was not 'only' a story, but illustrative of situations many families are currently facing in the UK[45].

[45] The play was written in 2016, and performed between 2016 and 2018. According to data gathered by Shelter in December 2019 over 230,000 people were homeless in England (with many more in

Whilst they felt for Cathy, they were simultaneously made acutely aware that this was not an isolated story, but one example of a much broader issue. This closely relates to Hegel's understanding of tragedy and the ways in which it may motivate social change, which also serves to challenge the earlier charge of 'compassionate listening' as a balm rather than an instigator of political action. In Hegel's view of tragedy, the tragic element comes from a central conflict between two, irreconcilable positions – both of which could be seen as the just course of action from different perspectives, yet each negate the existence of the other (Roche, 2007). For example, Cathy tries to keep Dani living with her, believing this to be best for her, even within the appalling conditions of emergency accommodation. The alternative, to place her in foster care or in the care of her father, may for others seem to be the just act. Hegel argues that rather than merely watching this conflict with sadness, tragedy pushes the spectator to question *why* this situation exists at all. For Hegel, it motivates us to imagine a world in which the protagonist did not face the hardships which lead to this conflict. Nussbaum draws on Hegel to argue that, in this way, "the end of the drama is written offstage, by citizens who enact these insights in their constructive political reflections" (2013: 270).

This is, perhaps, an overly optimistic interpretation of how audiences might react to tragic plays after they have returned home. However, in Forum and Legislative Theatre, this ending is not left to audiences to construct outside of the theatre space, but within the action of the piece. This critical reflection is performed, by the audience, within the space in a way which directly links it to structural and political issues. In my interviews, the Forum and Legislative elements of the piece were significant contributors to provoking an emotional response in the audience. The 'game' of the forum, particularly within Legislative Theatre, asks the audience to explore ways of overcoming the structural injustices Cathy, and her real life counterparts, face. Many interviewees spoke of the significance of this in terms of their emotional experience of the piece and how it encouraged them to think more about the political situation and how it could be different. For example,

> *…the performance combined with the Forum focuses people's minds on the fact that things don't need to be like this. And also helps people think*

Wales and Scotland). These figures portray a rise of 23,000 since 2016, when this play was first performed.

> *about changes they want to see… So I think that it helps to make the arguments for change sharper and I think that it helps to isolate those in Government the resist change and think that it helps build a broader consensus. That this isn't just about Labour politicians like me making the argument.* (Rt Hon John Healey, MP and Shadow Secretary for Housing, interviewed 05.03.2018)

Rt Hon John Healey saw a Legislative Theatre version of *Cathy* and spoke of the importance of spect-actors engaging with the relationship between this story and potential policy change. Another audience member commented:

> *…we're reminded, sadly, about how we've let people down. It's truly – again – what came through for me. …during my time in social work where there is a lot homelessness, and a lot of energy went into that, and there was a time when there was a lot of support, and its now pretty obvious politically, and what you see with your own eyes, that we're now revisiting homelessness. Its spread across every corner, in every doorway, shop, there communities springing-up of homeless people. And I think where we are now is what was being expressed [in the forum] and its people's genuine feelings of frustration and anger about how we've got to where we've got to.* (SM200618)

These audience members found that the experience of the forum compounded their emotional response to the structural issues depicted in the play, whilst also providing an opportunity to voice this anger, and explore what political changes could be made.

The prominence of the structural issues Cathy faced in the piece were significant to the company's decision to tour *Cathy* as a Legislative Theatre piece in its initial tour. However, it is important to note that Legislative Theatre presents its own set of limitations, not least due to its dependence on the commitment and actions of policy-makers, briefly addressed in chapter
3. Baz Kershaw argues that, "the practices of Legislative Theatre may even be seen by some as a capitulation to the very forces of oppression that the Theatre of the Oppressed had originally hoped to vanquish" (2001, p. 219). Jane Plastow echoes this concern, arguing "that citizens involved in this process [Legislative Theatre]

were not taking action themselves, but were in fact delegating their power for making change to the Worker's Party via Boal and his theatre activists" (2009, p. 297). They argue that Legislative Theatre can only be effective when it has the support of relevant authorities. "It is important to recognise the dangers of this supposedly revolutionary tool becoming domesticated, and used not by the people it purports to serve but by authority to achieve control through neoliberal means" (Plastow, 2009, p. 301). It is certainly true that Legislative Theatre needs not only support from authority figures, but their active engagement.

This issue was mentioned by audience members as well – particularly in terms of how these policies may actually effect Cathy's situation: "*I think that my fear is: when it gets into the hands of politicians out there, they can say well 'we put this thing in place', it actually takes somebody out there to activate what's going to change."* (SM200618)

However, this criticism could be directed at campaigning and lobbying of any kind, and is not specific to Legislative Theatre practice. This commentary seems perhaps more geared toward the limited nature of representative democracy rather than Legislative Theatre specifically. Indeed, Kershaw and Plastow's arguments echo critiques of deliberative and participatory democracy touched upon in chapter 2. Some scholars have argued that, when enacted by the state, these approaches offer a tokenistic form of citizen empowerment: "a democratic decision may be founded: first, a discursive and deliberative legitimacy, produced in the public sphere; second, the institutional legitimacy deriving from the rule of law within a democratic State and its constitutional foundations" (Floridia, 2013, p. 7). Legislative Theatre requires the engagement and involvement of policy-makers to enact change, and, as I shall argue in later chapters, *Cathy,* for the most part, lacked this kind of political efficacy.

5.1.4 The forum as a form of catharsis

The role of the forum in the emotional experience of the piece also returns us to Aristotle's definition of tragedy above and the notion of 'catharsis'. What Aristotle meant by catharsis has long been the subject of debate. He only uses the term once in *Poetics* and does not define it. "One of the most widespread (but by no means the dominant) interpretations of catharsis is that it involves the purgation of fear and

pity by evoking these emotions" (Nanay, 2018, p. 1372). This purgation or 'purification' idea draws other areas of Aristotle's work in which he refers to catharsis as a medicinal or homeopathic procedure, i.e. that concentrated exposure to these feelings helps us to rid ourselves of them. However, this does not seem to sit neatly with the notion of tragedy, fear and pity are not emotional states which we might need to exorcise, as we may wish to with feelings like greed or cowardice.

Another interpretation is 'intellectual catharsis', whereby catharsis is the intellectual legacy of the emotional experience of the tragedy (Nanay, 2018). According to this view, "we take pleasure in witnessing unpleasant events (such as in tragedy), as the pleasure is, in fact, a result of the learning process that those unpleasant events witnessed on stage bring about" (Belfiore & Bennett, 2008, p. 89). This characterises catharsis as a kind of embodied learning: through the emotional experience of the tragedy we better understand the moral or political teachings of the piece on an intellectual level.

Within Forum Theatre, Boal intended to distance himself from the cathartic elements of tragedy. The aim of Forum Theatre, for Boal, was not to instil certain moral or political teachings, or to exorcise unwanted emotions. Boal wished to reject what he saw as Aristotle's 'coercive system of tragedy' because he saw its primary purpose being to reinforce a hierarchical Athenian system, through which "the spectators are brought to reject anti-social elements within themselves, 'purged' of them in the process of catharsis"(Babbage, 2004, p. 47). Forum Theatre does indeed to evoke pity and fear, but for Boal, its purpose is not to offer catharsis for these emotions – rather to create "an uneasy sense of incompleteness that seeks fulfilment through real action." (ibid.).

I would argue that Boal's interpretation of Aristotle's use of catharsis within tragedy is somewhat reductive. Boal defines catharsis similarly to the medical account outlined above and argues its function in tragedy is to 'cure its audiences of anti-social behaviour' (Babbage, 2004). However, the tragedies Aristotle draws on in *Poetics* (e.g. *Oedipus at Colonus*, *Trojan Women*, *Antigone*) were often political contentious works and highly critical of the state which funded them. For example, *Trojan Women* (also known as *Troades)* by Euripides, depicts the tragedy which befalls the women of Troy, who are the protagonists of the piece, after their

city is captured by the Greeks. In the play, the Greek army has conquered Troy and has brutally killed all the men and enslaved the women. Although it was written for an Athenian audience, the piece predominately portrays the Greeks as the oppressors (Rosenbloom, 2006). This suggests that there was support for drama which was critical of the state and calls into question Boal's assertion that Ancient Greek drama was a tool for controlling anti-social behaviour.

I would argue that, particularly in the example of *Cathy,* Forum (or Legislative) Theatre itself offers a type of catharsis. A number of audience members commented that the forum provided a space in which to unload, discuss the piece and seek resolution to the tragedy they had witnessed. This opportunity did not necessarily mitigate their desire to seek resolution "through real action" (Boal, 1979, p. 42) outside of the space, but did offer a cathartic antidote to the frustration and despair evoked by *Cathy:*

> *You sort of need the forum afterwards because otherwise you have people leaving state of despair… Just thinking 'oh my god this is happening in the world is nothing I can do because it's so harrowing and shocking'. There is no happy ending in that production and I think that's why the forum is so important. Because it allows you to go 'hang on… Let's consider it from other points of view, how else could it end?'* (HT090318*)*

And,

> *I came out quite hopeful, you know when you hear other people either suggesting changes you want to see, or you've already thought about yourself and go 'great other people are thinking about this as well.'* (JP200718*)*

These comments, which are representative of a broader set of responses, could be understood in relation to both understandings of catharsis articulated above. The forum provided a space for the audience to overcome the negative feelings they had whilst watching Cathy, in a way that could be viewed as purifying. For these audience members, the forum transformed feelings of frustration and despair into something more hopeful and, for many, more practical. Ideally, it also offers a discursive space in which audience members can attempt solutions to the issues Cathy faces and, in this way, attempt to resolve the tragic narrative of the piece. In

terms of intellectual catharsis: within the forum the play is reframed as an opportunity for learning how to overcome oppressions through discussion and rehearsing alternatives. Rather than this process happening on an individual level after the audience has left the space, as suggested by both Nussbaum and Hegel above, the opportunity for reflection, or 'a cathartic learning process' (Nussbaum, 1986), is embedded within the action of the piece. It is important to note that Forum Theatre does not seek to teach predetermined moral or intellectual responses to Cathy's plight. The forum is an opportunity for the spect-actors to explore these ideas for themselves: both in acting them out within the action of the piece, and through the discussions which accompany these interventions.

5.2 The collective mood of the forum

So far in this chapter my reference to emotions has been primarily focussed on individual responses to the performance and the forum, whether they be towards Cathy, or the structural issues which have led to her tragic situation. From my interviews, the compassion and frustration mentioned in the preceding sections seemed to be felt by the majority of the audience. However, so far in my analysis, I have focussed on their expression and impact amongst individuals, rather than as a collectively felt 'mood'. In this section of the chapter I wish to explore the notion of collective feelings and how they may constitute a collective mood. I will be drawing on Ben Highmore's (2017) work on mood and feelings, which is in turn inspired by Raymond Williams' 'structures of feeling' (Williams, 1961).

Highmore defines four axioms which assist in this project; however, for the purposes of this chapter I will only be focussing on his first, and touching upon his second and third. Highmore's first axiom is "moods and feelings are material…[they] are embedded in cultural forms" (2017, p. 2). *Cathy* itself is a cultural form – it is constitutive and (on a small-scale) contributes to, the national political mood, particularly in relation to recent and current attitudes towards homelessness, gentrification and income precarity. The content and very existence of 'cultural forms', like *Cathy,* are themselves expressions of more general moods. The majority of the literature which addresses a notion of a collective mood or feeling does so at a broad social level: the mood of a country, or a whole community, or a generation (Ahmed, 2004; Coleman, 2013; Williams, 1961).

The aim of my project is more micro than this. It is not my intention to examine the political mood surrounding the issue of homelessness in the UK in 2016-2018, but the specific mood created by *Cathy* for the audiences who attended the performance. A key component of creating theatre is to evoke an emotional response from audiences – audiences who, in the live nature of the event, form a kind of collective. This relationship between theatre and collective feelings can be seen in the work of Plato (as a danger to society) and Aristotle (as a political asset) referenced above, as well as more contemporary theorists such as Antonin Artaud ([1964] 2017), Bertolt Brecht ([1964] 2018), Peter Brook ([1968] 2008) and Augusto Boal himself (1979). Indeed, many of these theorists define the aesthetic value of theatre by its emotional impact. "He wanted an audience that would drop all of its defences, that would allow itself to be perforated, shocked and startled, so that at the same time it could be filled with a powerful new charge" (Brook, [1968] 2008, p. 60). In this quote Brook is referring to Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty', and, like with many texts on theatre, the audience is referred to a singular entity: 'an audience', who feels collectively. Artaud's ideal, like Brook's 'Holy Theatre', was theatre which made the audience *feel*, in a very intense and all-encompassing way. He wished the audience feel things so strongly that it comprised a collective mood, almost communication, which overcame the divisions between spectator and the stage. Ideally, it would even overcome the confines of the theatre to pour out onto the streets: "…thereby rediscovering a little poetry in the ferment of great, agitated crowds hurled against one another…when masses of holiday crowds throng the streets" (Artaud, [1964] 2017, p. 60). The ideals of these theatre makers are ambitious, and (as they mostly acknowledge) fulfilling their respective visions for theatre is a rare occurrence in reality. However, it does serve to demonstrate the importance of collective feelings as an essential component of the craft itself.

Highmore's second axiom is that "moods and feelings are a form of labour" (2017, p. 3), in that, they are produced, often as a result of specific work to create a particular mood. As we have seen so far in this chapter, influencing feeling is a major aim of *Cathy* in both the performance and the forum. It is curated by the artists who created the piece. How the Joker also creates mood will be explored in more detail in the section below, but is undeniably intentional 'mood work'[46].

[46] A term used by Highmore (2017) to describe the labour of creating, sustaining or presenting certain

A sense of a collective mood is particularly apparent in the forums of *Cathy*, as the audience is directly invited to respond and express their feelings. However, it is also clear during the performance. For example, when Cathy is offered a flat, miles from her work and Dani's school as emergency accommodation: "*This scene gained a big reaction from the crowd, recognition and outrage. A lot of incredulous laughter and whispering"* (Field notes from a *Priority Needs* workshop 28.02.18). It can also be tangibly seen in the tears and laughter of the audience, both of which were widespread expressions in every performance I attended. There were also less tangible expressions of feelings within the performance, such as the hush of the audience and sense of expectation as the lights go down. These are collective feelings which are not necessarily visibly or physically expressed, but are palpably present within the space.

The forum is often described by TO practitioners as a 'game', and this is an apt description for the mood in the space. There are clear rules to follow and a referee in the form of the Joker. There are no opposing teams, rather the objective of the game is one shared by all: to improve the situation for the protagonist. All within the space are working toward this goal and this creates a shared sense of purpose and an underlying solidarity amongst the participants: including both the audience and the actors[47]. In my field notes I often refer to the audience as expressing a collective response to interventions, e.g. "*The audience does not like this intervention. They do not trust Glenn (Cathy's ex-husband) and do not want Dani to live with him*", or "*The audience likes this intervention and the atmosphere is more relaxed*". These impressions were generally based on vocal and physical indicators of feeling: laughter, heckles, arms folded and heads shaking, which are expressed by almost everyone in the room. This is an important thing to note: whilst maybe only a few people actually participate in interventions over the course of the event, the rest of the audience has also been given permission to react, to speak and to engage. Interventions are often met with heckles (both encouraging and disparaging) and lively debate follows each intervention, which involved most of the audience, regardless of whether they have intervened on stage.

moods.

[47] However, the actors are tasked with playing out their interventions 'as their character would behave on a bad day' (Terry O'Leary, field notes, 2018), as to not make the 'game' too easy for the audience. Immediate solutions do not support fruitful discourse.

In a successful forum, the shared mood can be compared to Highmore's description of an idealised university seminar in which:

> …people are listening to each other, not talking over each other, but still eager to contribute… people are willing to try out ideas but also to take responsibility for their positions… the mood is about attentiveness, about conviviality, about a willingness to share the time with each other. (2017, p. 12)

At the core of this description is a spirit of exchange, which Highmore describes as a 'mood'. In successful forums this same kind of mood can be felt. However, unlike most university seminars, the participants of a forum have just emerged from a highly affective and collective experience, i.e. the performance, and perhaps due to this, all the forums I attended this for research (and past Forum Theatre pieces) have been very emotionally charged.

The collective mood of *Cathy* is important in terms exploring the piece as a useful democratic space. This sense of shared feelings encourage the audience to feel part of a collective. This can be an emboldening and empowering feeling, as it reinforces the sense that change is possible when you feel and hear others expressing the same political wishes. This was expressed in multiple interviews. For example, *"…it felt rallying coming out of the show having heard lots of other people's voices broadly commit themselves to fighting this. You go – oh, wow!"* (LO280218).

This returns us to Highmore's axioms of mood; in particular his third axiom, that moods are social. "To say that something is social is to claim it is simultaneously collective and existing within a diverse and divisive arena. It is the quality of being both generally felt and specifically articulated is mood's domain" (2017, p. 3)[48]. Whilst there is regularly disagreement within the forum around the best course of action to take, or what policy solutions may be desirable or possible, there is a collective feeling of purpose towards improving life for Cathy and those who face homelessness more generally. This mood is important to the democratic space

[48] The degree to which this audience was 'diverse' is addressed in later chapters of this thesis. Cardboard Citizens had audience members representing all 10 of the Audience Agency Segments, with particularly high representation from Metroculturals, Experience Seekers and Kaleidoscope Creativity.

because it contributes to a sense of collectivity necessary for facilitating the discourse on the common good, described in chapters 2 and 3.

5.2.1 The darker side of moods

However, the shared purpose and mood in a forum space can also be problematic if there are those in the space who disrupt the mood of the collective. Unsuccessful interventions, like the one mentioned above in which a spect-actor suggested Dani stay with her father, are often dealt with in a playful way. If the Joker is a skilled one they will create an atmosphere which allows for failure and this kind of disagreement in a way that is fun and comfortable for the audience. There is still very much a sense that the audience is working together for a common goal. In the many interventions I witnessed for *Cathy,* there were rarely interventions with which the audience was completely satisfied. Indeed, this disagreement is a crucial aspect of the forum – this dissatisfaction continues to provoke interventions and discussion. The game should not be too easy to solve, or the discussion would dry up. There must be disagreement and failed attempts at resolutions for the forum to function.

However, there are sometimes interventions which express ambivalence toward to the game itself, or overtly express a different political stance to the broadly left-wing[49] perspective implicit in the play, which have been meet with more hostility. One audience member recalls the sense of a collective anger amongst the audience when an unwelcome political perspective challenged the broadly left-wing consensus at a performance at Edinburgh Fringe Festival (2017):

> *Interviewee: But there was one guy in the front row who I think we all collectively got really angry at, because they –it was right at the end when we were feeding back and they were the first person to put their hand up, and the guy (they were late as well, this crew), so we were already a bit like 'urgh, who is this.' He said like – it was something to the effect of 'sure we could try and change the law, change housing rights and all these sort of things, but wouldn't a story like this still happen?' They were very, like – like a fatalistic Tory – blaming individuals. 'There will always be people like*

[49] As in chapter 3, I am using the term left-wing to refer to approaches and perspectives typically associated with socialist ideology, social welfarism or social democratic approaches.

Cathy who make bad decisions'. It was that sort of view.

Interviewer: And how did the audience respond?
Interviewee: It was sort of a tense silence. And then the actor playing Cathy sort of like snapped straight in and got us back on track, you know, she was like… I can't remember what she said, but it was really… without being rude, but being brusque. Like 'we're looking at practical changes we can make to the world, not questioning the problem we've set up.' (JP200718)

In this memory the audience member recalls feeling a sense of a collective political mood in the space which was interrupted by this intervener. Their memory of the way this intervention was dealt with also suggests that this was not a space which allowed for views and voices that challenged the prevailing political mood. This is highly problematic in terms of creating a useful democratic space. Two key elements of the democratic space, as articulated in chapter 2, are listening and inclusivity, and this challenges them both. As previously articulated, listening in a democratic space requires accommodating disagreement and providing a productive space in which we may listen to opposing views. Susan Bickford argues that

> It is precisely the presence of conflict and difference that makes communicative interaction necessary… communicative interaction does not resolve the conflicts, but enables political actors to decide democratically how to act in the face of conflict and to clarify the nature of the conflict at hand. (1996, p. 2)

As touched upon in chapter 2, there are limits to providing space for opposing views – for example, when expressing certain views is harmful or 'silencing' (Langton, 1993) for others. However, the memory shared by this audience member is not clearly an example of a 'silencing' view which should be carefully dealt with[50], rather it suggests that the scope of acceptable views within the forum was particularly limited, to the detriment of its potential as a useful democratic space.

It should be noted that this memory was from a performance at Edinburgh Fringe in

[50] When something counts as harmful or 'silencing' is a subjective matter, however, there is no clear evidence from this story that there would be a group or demographic whose contributions would have been undermined by the view put forward by this 'fatalistic Tory'.

2017. Due to time constraints the performances which took place in Edinburgh had a very limited forum, roughly 15 to 20 minutes. The audience was asked for views and policy suggestions, but spect- actor interventions were not possible. Furthermore, this memory suggests that this limited forum was not hosted by a Joker, but by the actor playing Cathy. Had there been more time, and had the forum been hosted by a Joker, there may have been a more inviting approach to disagreements and interventions of this nature. Therefore, I would argue that rather than this kind of approach being standard within Forum and Legislative Theatre, this was an example of poor Jokering, specific to these limiting circumstances.

5.2.2 Setting the mood and Joking around

The Joker of the Theatre of the Oppressed plays a crucial role in creating the mood of the forum. They are so named as they "*do not belong to any one suit of cards – like they do not belong to either the actors or audience*" (Adrian Jackson, Artistic Director of Cardboard Citizens, interviewed 26.02.2018). However, there is also a clear relationship to the archetypal fool or trickster. Through absurdity, irreverence, folly and sharp perceptiveness, the Joker's aim, like that of the fools of Shakespeare or the tricksters of Mythology, is to "take spect-actors into areas usually hidden by the masks of hegemony, convention and common sense" (Prentki, 2015, p. 345). The specific role of the Joker in Forum and Legislative Theatre is to push the audience to question what they've seen, to discuss it and to take part in the action of the story. Boal also makes specific reference to the importance of the cultural identity of the Joker: "The Joker system was not a capricious creation; it was determined by the present-day characteristics of our society and more specifically, of our Brazilian public" (1979, p. 174). The Joker role is necessarily different in different cultural contexts. Like all of Boal's work he offers his version of the Joker as a starting point – one to be adapted to the needs of the local context. For example, in rural India, with Forum Theatre audiences often numbering in the hundreds (or even thousands), *"numerous Jokers wander through the crowd and interventions begin as conversations which are then drawn up onto the stage"* (Tim Wheeler, TO Practitioner, interviewed 14.02.19). In South America, the Joker/spect-actor relationship emerged out of the audience's readiness to intervene and be an active

part of the action[51] (Boal, 1979).

In the UK, the Joker's role is rooted in humour – often to ease the tension and nerves in the room which surround the prospect of getting up on stage. Humour is often the 'seduction' element of encouraging interventions (Jackson, 2009), sitting alongside the 'provocation' of tragedy. Audiences in the UK are often nervous of the forum, nervous about performing in front of others and exposing themselves. In one audience I was sat next to a man who, before the performance began, whispered to me: *"I'm sitting in the back because I heard it's going to be interactive"* (field notes from a *Priority Needs* workshop, 28.02.18). In an interview, another audience member describes how they found "*the forum part I found quite intimidating, I was feeling – yeah, like its quite nerve racking. The idea that you could possibly be involved…*" (JMMCT130618). Therefore, demonstrating that the forum is a space we can take pleasure in is crucial. Humour is a common technique in Forum and Legislative Theatre to ease tension, by demonstrating that it is all a game and not too serious. Humour can cut through the self- consciousness of performing in front of others and invites the audience to not take the act of intervening, or the forum, too seriously. Perhaps the most exposing thing within a forum is asking the spect-actor to state their views. With humour, the Joker sets the mood in a way that says – 'it's ok to be silly here, it's ok to not have all the answers: we are just playing a game.' The first intervention is often the most difficult. For example, "e*veryone is very animated for first woman who stands up – she is reluctant at first, but she gains confidence"* (field notes from *Priority Needs* workshop, 28.02.18). After this first intervention, when the forum is facilitated by a skilled Joker, it tends to get easier. "…others will follow with more ease, seeing that this original sin [breaking the fourth wall of theatre] has not resulted in cataclysmic consequences for its perpetrators – indeed discovering it can be fun" (Jackson, 2009, p. 45).

This lightness is balanced with the provoking subject matter of the play. The reason we want to get up is because we feel strongly about Cathy's fate: we are invested

[51] In early versions of Forum Theatre audience members would tell actors the intervention they wanted and this would be performed by the actor. At one performance a very animated woman in the audience explained her intervention to Boal (who was Jokering) and the actor. Each time it was attempted the woman was unsatisfied. Eventually Boal invited the woman onto the stage and the spect-actor was born.

in the problems she faces, we feel the tragedy of her situation. However, the reason we feel able to get up is because it is not too serious, it is framed as a game which is fun and humorous. This mix, in Jackson's terminology, of 'seduction and provocation', is essential to Forum and Legislative Theatre in the UK.

This mix is clearly present in this audience member's account of an intervention they witnessed at *Cathy*:

> *In the Luton showing I think Cathy had a handbag and when you went up [you were given the handbag to embody Cathy]… as one lady wouldn't let go of the handbag, and it became part of her, the handbag. It became this protection, but also looked like she was going to thump any of the actors with this handbag and it became weaponised [laughter], and I just remember… It stays with me is a really important moment. That's how she felt – she was ready to take on the world… [laughter] She held onto that bag because it mattered. It mattered so much and she wasn't going anywhere until she had the answers to questions and was determined. I think one thing about the character of Cathy is that she is progressively broken as she moves through the piece. And there is that point where she is about to get the offer of a new flat and she's smiling like a Cheshire cat and there's this desperation and she's just about to be given something – she's like a small child. But actually she's at her most fragile at that point. She's dangerously close to the edge. I think the woman with the handbag showed that quality, she had that intense fragility of the character.* (AM110418)

There is comedy in this recollection, the interviewee regularly laughed in its retelling. However, there is also a sense of frustration and sadness in the fragility of both Cathy and the spect-actor which is recollected. In this way the recollection demonstrates the powerful combination of humour and tragedy at play within Forum and Legislative Theatre performances.

This has broader significance in thinking about the role of emotions within political discourse. Understanding political discourse as fun, playful and humorous is crucial to inclusivity. By creating spaces which focus on difficult and troubling questions of oppression with a spirit of play, Cardboard Citizens reframe political

discourse as a social and enjoyable event – rather than a sacrificial, challenging and (often) dull activity. The value of this is laid out in Duncombe's investigation of the role of fantasy within progressive politics: "the projection of fun was part of a conscious strategy…to counteract the public perception of leftists as dour, sour and politically correct…" (2007, p. 91). He argues that through making political activity playful we are able to invite in a broader group of citizens, many of whom may not ordinarily engage with politics, and also manage to maintain that engagement, as political engagement becomes something positively associated with sociability and fun. This is an important aspect of Cardboard Citizens' work: to address issues of oppression through theatre, to offer political discourse as a 'game', to facilitate with humour, engages a wider range of participants in a deeper way. For this research, I have not collected data which confirms whether audiences for *Cathy* usually engage with more traditional political forums. However, my data does show that performances were consistently well-attended and often sold-out, and within my fieldwork I observed laughter, playfulness and clear enjoyment interlaced with political discourse related to serious issues of homelessness and oppressive working conditions.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, *Cathy* stimulated significant and lasting emotional responses for its audiences. The piece evoked compassionate responses towards Cathy as an individual, as well as the structural issues which contributed to her situation. It created an (at times problematic) sense of a collective mood, and enabled a playful space for discussion. Each of these achievements have political significance, some which help to enable a useful democratic space and some which compromise it. To organise my interpretation of this political significance I now return to the framework of a democratic space outlined in chapter 2 of this thesis. I believe that the emotional nature of *Cathy* relates to four of the five elements: inclusion, listening, common good and political efficacy. The emotional nature of the piece did not appear to have particular relevance to imagination and belief in alternatives. However, this element will be addressed in relation to *Cathy* in chapters 6 and 8.

Firstly, the emotional experience of *Cathy* presents useful, although at times limited, opportunities for **inclusion**. As Carol Pateman (2012) argues, inclusion is

not only related to who is invited into the space, but also who feels able to contribute within the space. There must be multiple approaches to political discourse to enable diverse perspectives. Therefore, the approach to communication is important to consider within a democratic space. Through the use of provocation (via the employment of tragic techniques) and seduction (through the use of humour and irreverence as employed by the Joker) Cardboard Citizens creates a space in which spect-actors are invited to contribute in a performative and affective manner. Interventions and the conversations within the Forum are a form of political discussion. However unlike more traditional spaces for political discussions, this space is facilitated in a way which prioritises emotional expression as a form of engagement (for example, the highly emotive intervention described above regarding the woman and her handbag). The emotional nature of the piece is also a provocation for more traditional forms of political discussion (for example, the debates and policy suggestions which follow interventions). In this way, the forum creates a space in which emotional expression is both a grounding for more traditional political discourse, as well as a legitimate form of political communication in itself. This broadens the approaches to political discourse, thereby broadening who feels able to share views and ideas within the democratic space.

However, it is important to note that those who expressed political views at odds with the broadly left-wing bias of the space (e.g. the aforementioned 'fatalistic Tory' in the audience in Edinburgh), were, at times, unable to express their views and were excluded from contributing to the democratic space. This undermined the inclusivity of the space.

Creating a space in which there is a mood for **listening** is a crucial task for the Joker within the forum. At its best, the forum creates a space of conviviality, humour and supportive exchange, in which spect-actors feel comfortable to voice feelings, information and opinions. A space in which listening is possible and disagreements are useful and collaborative rather than purely combative. However, this mood is not always achieved within the forum and the space can become exclusionary for those who voice alternative political positions to the dominant left- wing consensus amongst most audiences. In this way, the emotional nature of the *Cathy* can hinder a useful democratic space rather than support it. There was evidence of both types

of forums – both supportive and convivial, and exclusionary – within my interviews and fieldwork. The mood of the forum was highly dependent on the skills of the Joker.

Arguably, the emotional experience of *Cathy* encourages a kind of compassionate listening. Dobson (2014) argues that compassion is not a useful form of listening in terms of political discourse as it is one sided and uses listening as a kind of balm for the concerns of citizens: aiming to placate, rather than stimulate and advance political change. This echoes Boal's own concerns with the coercive effect of Aristotle's catharsis: that tragedy and the evocation of compassion purges the spectators of 'antisocial' feeling, rather than evoking political feeling or action (1979, pp. 36-39). However, for the most part my fieldwork showed that the emotional response to Cathy's plight does not only offer passive compassion toward the protagonists, but also anger towards the structural issues she faces in the play. These two emotional responses are highly interrelated and there is evidence to show that these responses provoked discussion within the space, as well as action beyond the space.

Creating a collective mood can foster a focus on the **common good**, which is crucial in creating a useful democratic space. The forum generates a sense of working toward a common goal, namely to improve Cathy's situation and the lives of others who may face similar injustices. Many audience members commented on the importance of this as an opportunity to see and hear that strangers felt similarly to them in relation to this issue. For them, there was power in feeling that there was a collective who appeared committed to acting on the political issues raised by the play. Audience members commented that interacting with others who shared their feelings of injustice was politically motivating in that it contributed to a belief that things could change[52]. This sense of being a part of a collective is an important element of a useful democratic space.

Lastly, the emotional experience of *Cathy* had an effect on the **political efficacy** of the space. In the typology of political efficacy laid out in chapter 2, evidence from this chapter suggests that the emotional experience of *Cathy* supported both

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[52] The Jokers of *Cathy* generally alluded to the other policy suggestions from around the country during the Legislative Theatre process, particularly in concluding the event.

political literacy (in terms of knowledge/understanding of an issue) and political confidence (motivation and confidence to take political action). The ways in which *Cathy* may have impacted upon policy had little to do with its emotional nature and is explored in more detail in chapter 8.

First, the tragic and relatable nature of the performance evoked a kind of emotional awareness of the potential journey to homelessness. Whilst every audience member I interviewed was already concerned with the issue of homelessness, many spoke of the importance of seeing it from this perspective and the deeper emotional understanding this afforded them. This project of 'awareness raising' was a key aim of the project for Cardboard Citizens (Michael Chandler, Programme Director of Cardboard Citizens, interviewed 05.03.18). Whilst there was little evidence to suggest that any audience members had their minds changed on this issue, the piece clearly offered a deeper, and more emotional, understanding of the issues surrounding homelessness – even for those who worked in the sector.

Secondly, this emotional response in turn motivated action outside of the space. Based on Cardboard Citizens' *Citizens Do* survey, 76% of those who signed up to the campaign completed a suggested action (e.g. writing to your MP, volunteering with local homelessness action group). Audience members commented on the way in which *Cathy* "*strengthened their resolve"* to make change (AM110418). The emotional longevity of *Cathy* is significant in relation to its political efficacy. *Cathy* was an experience which stayed with its audiences for months (and even years) after seeing the production. For example, I interviewed one audience member who had seen the piece 18-months previously and spoke of specific moments in the show and their continued emotional response to the piece: "*But I want to say that like its sticks around in your emotional memory and that's how it hangs on. And then you remember those bits and it floods out again*" (JP200718). This lasting nature suggests that the political efficacy of the piece, whilst it may be localised and small-scale, is long term, effecting audiences' attitudes and behaviour toward homelessness for many months after their engagement with the show.

Overall, whilst the emotional nature of the piece sometimes jeopardised the inclusivity and the quality of listening within the space, it predominately supported the necessarily conditions for a useful democratic space.

Chapter 6: Expertise and symbolic gestures in *Cathy* by Ali Taylor and Cardboard Citizens

Augusto Boal described the Theatre of the Oppressed (TO) as a 'rehearsal of revolution': "Theatre is action! Perhaps the theatre is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal of revolution!" (Boal, 1979, p. 155). In using TO techniques, Boal argued, we could address urgent political questions of how to overcome oppressions, and rehearse methods of overcoming injustice and inequality in reality. In the symbolic gesture of becoming a spect- actor and therefore an active part of the storytelling process, participants rehearse the possibility of taking action in reality: "the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters to think or to act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself!" (ibid). John Berger (1968) uses the same phrasing to describe the political importance of mass demonstrations:

> The truth is that mass demonstrations are *rehearsals for the revolution*: not strategic or even tactical ones, but rehearsals of revolutionary awareness… [it] is a created event which arbitrarily separates itself from ordinary life. Its value is the result of its artificiality, for therein lies its prophetic, rehearsing possibilities. (1968, p. 11, emphasis added)

In these quotes, TO and mass demonstrations find their political significance as symbolic gestures rather than as tactical revolutionary acts. Neither are offering an immediate means of overthrowing an oppressive force and enacting the socialist revolution, but suggest TO and demonstrations as powerful prefigurative acts, which offer participants the belief, energy, solidarity and/or embodied learning needed for social change. In this way, it could be argued that Forum and Legislative Theatre find their political significance through a prefigurative notion of 'rehearsal', as an opportunity for learning and empowerment.

In this chapter, I will be unpicking Boal's claim of a 'rehearsal for the revolution' in relation to Cardboard Citizens' production of *Cathy.* I argue that although Cardboard Citizens is not aiming for revolution in their tours of *Cathy,* they do succeed in creating meaningful political discourse and action on the issues surrounding homelessness in the UK. I will also be drawing on the Freirean roots

of Theatre of the Oppressed and exploring how an alternative approach to expertise and a breakdown in traditional teacher/student (or in this case actor/spectator) dynamics has been employed in *Cathy.*

This exploration of how Freire's pedagogical theory influenced Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed, and specifically how this has been expressed in *Cathy,* begins the chapter. This is followed by an investigation of the different approaches to expertise and knowledge within the space. I then turn to the layers of symbolism contained within *Cathy* and the ways in which this supports its political role, as well as how it may detract. I conclude this chapter by explicitly relating this work to my theoretical framing of useful democratic spaces.

6.1 Pedagogy and Theatre of the Oppressed

Boal's work on the Theatre of the Oppressed was heavily influenced by Paulo Freire's pedagogical work. Their work contains the same egalitarian and socialist visions and both were fundamentally focussed on the notion of the emancipation of the oppressed. Their work also developed within similar cultural conditions at roughly the same time – Freire was ten years older than Boal, and both were imprisoned and exiled from Brazil for their ideas and teachings; both also served within the Workers Party in Brazil at different points. Given this contextual relationship, it is important to understand Boal's work through a Freirean lens. This will inform the analysis of this chapter both in terms of examining the various types of expertise in play within *Cathy* and the political importance of symbolic acts.

As explored in chapter 2, Freire argued that, for emancipation to take place, we must first believe in the possibility of alternatives, and then also envision practical routes toward those alternatives. "…the reality of oppression not as a closed world from which there is no exit, but as a limiting situation which they ['the oppressed'] can transform" (Freire [1970] 2018, p. 31). This philosophy can also be seen in the work of Augusto Boal, and within the work of Cardboard Citizens. Through his Theatre of the Oppressed techniques Boal hoped to reimagine the role that theatre may play in this revolutionary project: offering a space to model political alternatives (Legislative Theatre) and practical ways in which to overcome oppressions (Forum Theatre).

> …it gives the protagonist the opportunity of trying once more and carrying

> out, in fiction, what he had not been able to do in reality… having rehearsed a resistance to oppression will prepare him to resist effectively in a future reality, when the occasion presents itself once more. (Boal, 1979, p. 150)

Freire argued that power imbalances and oppressions are contained within our language: both in terms of who is allowed to speak (or, in Freirean parlance, 'name the world') and the hierarchies which are contained within the structure of language itself. "…the word is more than just an instrument to make dialogue possible… to speak a true word is to transform the world" (Freire, [1968] 1996, p. 70). Freire's 'true words' are closely linked to the political value of symbolic gestures – interventions within Forum and Legislative Theatre are exercises in naming and re-naming the world. By stepping onto the stage to perform an alternative set of actions, the spect-actor is presenting a new way of understanding the world. The role and importance of this kind of symbolic gesture will be discussed with specific reference to *Cathy* later in this chapter.

Forum and Legislative Theatre also mirror Freire's pedagogical emphasis on experimentation and dialogue (as outlined in chapter 2). The Joker, who may most closely resemble the role of 'teacher' with Theatre of the Oppressed, functions as a facilitator, whose primary aim is to encourage interventions and discussion. This disrupts more traditional notions of teaching and theatre more generally: it is not up to the pre-identified 'knowledgeable' party (e.g. teacher, playwright or performers) to convey information to a passive audience.

There are links to be drawn with Rancière's work, with reference to the practice of the Joker. Rancière critiques the work of Brecht and Artaud as in its intention to go beyond teaching ideological positions they ends up attempting to 'teach their spectators ways of ceasing to be spectators' (2009, p. 8). In this critique he draws on his earlier work – *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1991) –which offers the metaphor of a school teacher who, in order to stay in the position of power, must constantly create a new form of ignorance to maintain a distance between himself and his pupil. Sociologist Spyros Papaioannou has attempted to extend this critique to Boal's work (2014). He argues that the Joker holds the power in terms of leading how the 'game' of Forum Theatre is played: they are the expert in the space when it comes to *how* to participate, thereby creating an unequal power dynamic between

the spect-actor and the Joker. Indeed, as discussed in chapter 5, there was an account of a Joker who 'shut down' an intervention they deemed inappropriate within the *Cathy* performances in Edinburgh, although, most TO practitioners would describe this as poor Jokering.

I would argue Papaioannou's criticism cannot be adequately applied to Theatre of the Oppressed – or, more specifically, to Cardboard Citizens' production of *Cathy*, as to do so misunderstands the pedagogical basis for TO. It also makes an assumption that to teach is always to create an imbalance of power. Boal, like Freire, explicitly aims to challenge the hierarchical power dynamics of more traditional teacher-student relationships within TO. "It is only possible to teach something to someone who teaches us something back. Teaching is a transitive process, a dialogue…" (Boal, 1998, p. 128). The Joker's role is to invite or provoke the spect-actor to take part in a two-way exchange, rather than to maintain the power of expertise as in the case of the ignorant schoolmaster. Like Freire's approach to teaching, the aim of Forum Theatre is exchange. This method 'does not dichotomize the activity of the teacher-student… [the teacher] does not regard cognizable objects as his private property but as the object of reflection by himself and the students' (Freire, [1968] 1996, p. 61) .

A successful forum within TO is one in which there are multiple and varied interventions, disagreements, moments of consensus and engagement from all in the room- and through these multiple forms of engagement, there is learning. "The students [or spect-actors in *Cathy*] – no longer docile listeners – are critical co-investigators in dialogue with the teacher" (Freire, [1968] 1996, p. 62). This line of investigation leads us onto how traditional dynamics of expertise and learning are disrupted within TO. There are a number of types of expertise at play within the development, performances and forums of *Cathy.*

6.2 Knowledge generation and expertise in *Cathy*

Like all Forum and Legislative Theatre productions, Cardboard Citizens aimed to create a space in which the audience become active discussants and interveners within the forums of *Cathy*. Amongst *Cathy's* audiences, there was a clear sense that learning came from both the performance and experimentation within interventions, as well as through exchange of various types of expertise in the room.

Knowledge came from the audience as much as from the performers. In terms of the latter:

> *Interviewee: It sort of opens your eyes and go 'wow, I was really ignorant to all these facts and this politics.' So yeah.*
>
> *Interviewer: And was that – did that came out from the show or from the forum?*
>
> *Interviewee: From the forum. Definitely. Because there was a lot of people, as I said, there was lot of people during the forum who were social workers or working in the sector who knew all these things. So they were kind of teaching everyone in the room – all the terminology and all the politics which they face. Which opened my eyes a lot.* (CA300518)

In each performance I attended there were homeless, ex-homeless and/or audience members who worked in 'frontline'[53] services. As mentioned in chapter 4, Cardboard Citizens makes a significant effort to ensure these voices are in the space through local networks and offering free tickets to those with experience of homelessness and third sector staff. I found that these audience members were often the most vocal within the forums. This disrupts a "banking" approach to education[54] (which may be more prevalent in more traditional forms of political theatre) as, within Forum and Legislative Theatre, the expertise does not originate only from the stage, conveyed to a passive audience, it also comes from the audience itself. The actors and the Joker (who, in more traditional political theatre, may be the experts informing an audience) act as facilitators and provocateurs to enable exchange of knowledge within the audience.

In my fieldwork it was clear that the forums prioritised a number of different types of expertise, and different approaches to political expression, than those which are prioritised within traditional democratic spaces. In many traditional democratic spaces, like those outlined in chapter 2, there is often an emphasis on theoretical knowledge, backed up with scientific and statistical evidence, rather than personal and often emotional accounts, with these "less exact forms of knowledge relegated

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[53] Those who work directly with homeless people or those at risk of homelessness. For example, hostel staff, support workers, local council workers, social workers, housing association staff and those working on charitable projects to do with housing and workers' rights.

[54] As described in chapter 2, Freire's definition of a "banking approach" to education is an approach which understands students as "receptacles to be filled by the teacher" (Freire, [1968] 1996, p. 53).

to lower ranks of prestige" (Weiler, 2009)[55]. Within the forums of *Cathy* emotional expressions and those based on personal experiences were the interventions which led to lively discussion and stayed with audience members in the weeks and months following the performance.

Within the forums of *Cathy* multiple forms of political knowledge and opinion were expressed. Over the course of my fieldwork I noted appeals to specific policy knowledge, interventions explicitly based on personal experiences, and even almost non-verbal emotional outpourings. Each of these interventions was treated with equal weight by the Joker. Each was examined and discussed amongst the audience. For example, in one performance I attended the audience got very excited for a spect-actor who offered an emotional response: *"She is angrier than the third spect-actor and the intervention seems to escalate quickly. The audience shouts out that she should not leave. She should sleep in the housing office"* (Field notes, 01.05.2018, The Albany Theatre). At the same performance, the audience also enjoys a technical and policy- driven approach:

> *The second intervention is about a technical and legal clause regarding the names on the letters, which are addressed to Glenn [Cathy's ex-husband], not Cathy. The spect- actor appears to work within sector, perhaps with Crisis Skylight. The audience enjoy this intervention. A CC Member sat next to me expresses, 'ah yeah, that's interesting, I'd not thought of that. If the letters are in his name, perhaps the rent arrears are legally his.'* (Field notes, 01.05.2018, The Albany Theatre)

A common starting point for interventions in *Cathy* was personal experience of the hardships faced by Cathy, and/or experience based on working within 'frontline' services. Like other democratic spaces, there is often significant in-depth policy knowledge contained within these interventions. However, perhaps unlike many traditional democratic spaces, this expertise originated from those who have faced the implications of these policies, rather than from a theoretical or statistical perspective. Cardboard Citizens works closely with their membership to explore the most pressing issues facing the homeless and vulnerably housed, and have found

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[55] The problematic approaches to debate and limited notions of what counts as legitimate political discourse is addressed in more detail in chapter 2 of this thesis in relation to inclusivity and democratic listening.

that the most in-depth and specific understanding of housing policy often comes from those who have been, or are, homeless. Indeed, all of Cardboard Citizens' plays are based on the detailed and personal insights of their members. This is demonstrated in *Cathy* by the recorded voices of CC Members' accounts of homelessness, which play during every scene change. The process of creating the piece was also dependent on this the personal experiences of the Membership: "*We also knew from our Members what was happening on the ground – that more and more homeless families who are London-based were being moved out and not offered accommodation within their boroughs.*" (Terry O'Leary, interviewed 05.03.2018, discussing how the plot of *Cathy* was developed). There was an emphasis on the personal experiences of those living and working with issues related to homelessness from the conception of the play, right up into the forums whilst it toured the country.

An emphasis on lived experience, and a dismissal of more traditional forms of expertise, is often a technique employed within populist rhetoric (Müller, 2017). For example, Michael Gove's interview with Faisal Islam on Sky News during the EU referendum campaign, in which Gove said that 'people in this country have had enough of experts' (Gove, 2016). This was a common theme within the Leave Campaign in 2016, who's refrain 'taking back control' capitalised on a significant 'anti-politics' sentiments (Richards, Purdam, Richardson, & James, 2017). Another example from the UK is Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson recently positioning himself as working on behalf of 'the people' in opposition to 'parliament' in the 2019 General Election (Russel, 2019). This rhetoric of calling upon 'the people', and positioning themselves against a perceived elite, is reminiscent of left-wing movements like those Boal and Freire were working within in the 1970s and 1980s[56]. In light of these political developments, the emphasis on lived experience within the forums of TO takes on a new kind of significance, which seems to overlap with a growing populist rhetoric in the UK.

As addressed in chapter 2 of this thesis, neoliberalism consistently seeks to show that for almost every policy decision there is measurement, expertise and inarguable facts which can make the decision for us: there is no need for politics, only

[56] Although this is also a technique which has been used on the right – e.g. Fascist parties in the 1930s.

pragmatism and statistics. This is an approach which is detrimental to democracy as it erases the need for discussion or citizen engagement, as policies are made by the experts (Brown, 2015). Both TO and populism seem to be challenging this approach. The structure of Forum Theatre and, in turn *Cathy,* emphasises the importance of lived experience within the creation of the piece, as well as within the interventions and discussion. However, unlike populist rhetoric, this work does not posit itself *against* expertise, as Michael Gove does in the quote above. The play and the discussion within the forum often turns to more traditional forms of expertise, such as statistics or dissections of existing policy – indeed, often these contributions are indivisible from stories of personal experiences.

In relation to expertise in *Cathy,* it should also be reiterated that, along with an emphasis on knowledge emerging from lived experience in the forum, knowledge and perspectives are also often expressed in an emotional way. Within a successful forum there are multiple ways to contribute to the dialogue: some of which are non-verbal, some of which are entirely about an expression of feeling, and some of which are (as mentioned above) about conveying technical expertise. As explored in earlier chapters, a historic false dichotomy between emotion and rationality has governed our approach to political discourse. In the forum, policy and structural issues are explored in relation to an emotional individual story, and expressions of feeling are as welcome as other contributions:

> *And do remember another intervention was less successful, interestingly enough... They knew all the right things to say, but Cathy wouldn't be armed with all the right things to say. But this person was, so it just didn't work out. This person knew the law, and that's great – but that's not what you're facing when you're going into one of those offices and temporary accommodation.* (AM110418)

This quote challenges the value of policy expertise within the forum. For this audience member, the interventions most valued were those which successfully expressed the high emotion of the situation: the frustration and despair felt by Cathy, and sought ways in which she could reclaim dignity and power within her situation. For this audience member, the interventions which emphasised emotional expression were the most motivating.

This is a distinctive value offered by the form of Forum/Legislative Theatre compared to many other democratic spaces: it allows for emotional, and even non-verbal, expression alongside more technical discussions of policy. In this way, the forum goes some way to create a Freirean pedagogical space which is 'based on creativity and stimulates true reflection and action upon reality' (Freire, [1968] 1996, p. 65).

6.3 Prefigurative politics and symbolic gestures

The other pedagogical technique within Forum and Legislative Theatre, which reflects the radical pedagogy of Paulo Freire, is experimentation and modelling alternatives through interventions: "…we must pose this existential, concrete, present situation to the people as a problem which challenges them and requires a response" (Freire, [1968] 1996, p. 77). The structure of Forum and Legislative Theatre seems to directly respond to this call. In inviting the audience to take part in the action of the piece through interventions, Boal wished to deepen the notion of active spectatorship explored in the work of Brecht's 'epic theatre', or Artaud's 'Theatre of Cruelty'[57]. However, he wished to develop the theatre into a space in which the spectators were not only encouraged to think, but also to act (1979, p. 155). The aim of the invitation for intervention is to allow the spect-actor the opportunity to rehearse alternatives to the situation played out before them. In this way they can explore practical ('*nuts and bolts'* – Terry O'Leary, 05.03.18) solutions within Forum Theatre, or political and structural solutions within Legislative Theatre to oppressions faced.

For some audience members, these interventions had a pedagogical and symbolic value, beyond the actual solutions which were suggested and debated, through the very act of intervening:

> *I think there's something really important about the idea – having the spect-actor starting to make that movement onto the stage. I think there's something really important about that. Thinking about what would I do in that situation goes beyond that kind of notion of sitting there and watching a show, then going home and going 'I don't have to think about that again'*

[57] Boal was deeply influenced by Brecht's work and he references Brecht's Epic Theatre a great deal in *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979).

> *... I think that with Legislative Theatre I have this sense of, with the legislation, that there is a solution that we can come up with…* (AM110418*).*

For this audience member, who did not personally perform an intervention, there was value in the invitation itself. This invitation encouraged those in the audience to actively consider how they may overcome the oppressions faced by Cathy: in this case, particularly in terms of policy solutions. This again echoes Freire's pedagogical approach: "Students [or spect-actors in this case], as they are increasingly posed with problems relating to themselves in the world and with the world, will feel increasingly challenged and obliged to respond to that challenge" (Freire, [1968] 1996). The very invitation of interventions in the forum demands active reflection from the audience, on how they may overcome these hardships. In the forums of *Cathy* this was in terms of what you may personally do differently on a micro-level, as well as about how broader social and political systems needed to be changed.

The power of the invitation itself, and the gesture of the intervention, also relates to the significance of symbolic gesture within Forum and Legislative Theatre. The notion of symbolic gestures is often at the edges of the discussion of the political role of Theatre of the Oppressed, for better and for worse. Here I wish to address the ways in which it could be considered both an important component in terms of the political efficacy of Theatre of Oppressed, and the ways in which it is considered a shortcoming ofTO. I will begin by briefly contextualising my use of the terms 'symbols' and 'symbolic gesture' in this thesis.

in the building up of human society" (Morelos, 1999). Phenomenologist Merleau Ponty speaks of symbolic forms of behaviour as creative expressions which offer a sense of the situation, "transposing meaning from one structure to another" (Landes, 2013, p. 219). According to this definition, one of the ways we understand the world around us is through symbols. The purpose and social significance of symbols is contained in how we understand and shape the world around us.

Discussion of symbols and symbolic gestures in terms of political change primarily focuses on the use of prefigurative politics within social movements and political change. Demonstrations, as referenced by John Berger (1968) in the introduction

to this chapter, are explored according to their 'symbolic' value. Likewise with political campaigns: there is a historical trend of campaigns by candidates who have no chance of winning (due to race, class or gender), but the 'symbolic gesture' of their candidacy has political value in itself[58] (Simien, 2015). Simien argues, through the *symbolic* gesture of running for office, these candidates made the *actual* action of running for office possible. In both demonstrations and these candidacies, a kind of alternative to the current social reality is performed, in order to help bring these realities into existence. Indeed, the 'performative' nature of these gestures are a key aspect of their symbolic power. They prefigure political futures through performing alternative visions of the future on a small (and perhaps exaggerated) scale, as a figurative representation of a broader aim for society. For example, in April 2019 Extinction Rebellion protests in London transformed Waterloo Bridge into a green public space, with fruit trees and flowers, as well as hay bales and grass for protesters and passers-by sit on and listen to speakers, performances and music. This symbolic transformation of Waterloo Bridge physically expressed the aims of Extinction Rebellion through a six-day long performance of what London could be: green and public. The living out of alternatives within demonstrations like Extinction Rebellion has a symbolic power: it shows that change is possible by demonstrating or 'rehearsing' alternatives in a symbolic manner.

Augusto Boal himself celebrated the symbolic nature of interventions, in a similar way to the audience member quoted above:

> You can be dynamised also by what the actors say on stage. But you are even more dynamised when you go on stage. Because by doing so what you do is a transgression. To penetrate into the stage is a transgression. And then it works symbolically to tell the spectator, "I am able to do this here". The phrase I-am-able-to-do-this-here includes I- am-able-to-do-this. OK here, but if I am able to do this here, I am perhaps able to do this somewhere else. And this fact that the spectator enters into the scene is a symbolic

[58] "Election 2008 made American history, but prior campaigns paved the way, starting in 1972 and 1984 with the candidacies of Shirley Christholm and Jesse Jackson, respectively. While unsuccessful, they were significant. Rich in symbolic meaning and electoral consequence for future presidential hopefuls…" (Simien, 2015, p. 2).

> transgression; symbolic of all the transgressions. It is a transgression in itself and is a symbolic transgression of all the other transgressions he has to make. Because, of course, if the oppressed is going to fight not to be oppressed, inevitably he is going to make some sort of transgression. (as quoted by, Morelos, 1999)

In this passage there are two layers of symbolism: the symbolic gesture of physically entering the performance space, a space traditionally impassable, and the symbolic exchange in which the spect-actor challenges the oppressions depicted in the piece. The political value of these symbolic interventions comes from the very act of entering the space of 'meaning-making' (i.e. the stage), and altering the outcomes of the story depicted. This relates to discussion above regarding the 'naming of the world' in Freire's radical pedagogy. As mentioned before, symbols represent reality and Boal suggests this relationship may also go the other way: that in changing symbols we also change reality. "Symbols, as a parallel reality to the empirical one, shape us as individuals and as a society – it is also how we as individuals in society shape our world" (Morelos, 1999, p. 17). Boal argues that the act of changing reality in the forum, although symbolic, has meaning. He tells the story of an entirely symbolic demonstration of Legislative Theatre in Munich. They performed in the City Hall and in the audience was an "old lady with white hair and a cane" who came forward at the end and said: "…I know that this is just a symbolic action. But it was very important for me: you have shown that this is possible" (1998, p. 121). This is a single anecdote, but it also relates to a larger body of work, referenced in chapter 2, which speaks of the need for a belief that change is possible for change to occur: 'the first step in political change is simply believing alternatives are possible' (Davies, 2017, p. 19). This was a theme mentioned repeatedly in my interviews for both *Cathy* and *We Know Not What We May Be* (which will be the subject of the next chapter): *"…the performance, combined with the forum, focuses people's minds on the fact that things don't need to be like this. And also helps people think about changes they want to see"* (Rt Hon John Healey MP, interviewed 05.03.2018). And,

> *…and I think that's why the forum is so important. Because it allows you to go 'hang on… Let's consider it from other points of view, how else could it end?' To empower people to say that actually, there are solutions.*

(HT090318)

The symbolic act of seeing potential solutions be played out in interventions, for these audience members, served to reinforce the belief that change is possible outside of the theatre space. Indeed, some audience members drew direct correlations between the symbolic interventions and suggestions for changes within the forum, and actions which were then taken outside the space.

Ensuring the symbolic gestures within the space translated into real actions outside the space was a key aim of the project for Cardboard Citizens and the primary reason for the *Citizens Do* campaign, which toured alongside *Cathy* during the 2018 tour:

> *So now we can offer our audience the opportunity to do something, instead of giving it to the hands of the politicians. We want to encourage them to get involved to do something… offer different ways of being involved whether that's community campaigns and charities and local groups. And also local people sharing what they already do.* (Terry O'Leary, interviewed 05.03.18).

Interventions and discussions within the forum, particularly in the second tour (which was Forum rather than Legislative Theatre, with the accompanying *CitizensDo* campaign), were focussed around how to improve Cathy's situation, or at least make it more bearable. For example, better access to food and toiletries, or demanding more respect from council workers. In the context of the forum, these were symbolic gestures, rehearsing alternatives to the situation performed.

> *The same woman who performed the first intervention comes back up on stage and attempts the same solution as the man who went before [demanding more suitable temporary accommodation]. However, she is angrier than the previous spect-actor and the intervention escalates quickly. The audience shouts out that she should not leave. She should sleep in the housing office if necessary. However, others worry that this would only lead to her arrest and potentially the involvement of Social Services. In the audience's discussions following these interventions they seem to agree that this intervention practically achieves little, perhaps even leads to Dani being taken away, however, 'it is good to make a stand'."* (Field

notes, 01.05.2018, Albany Theatre London)

Everyone in the audience seemed to agree that 'making a stand' was important, however they were also aware this would make little practical difference. It was more about reclaiming power
- a symbolic gesture to show strength and resistance in the face of injustice, which, although it did not improve the situation in practical terms, felt symbolically important. For many in the audience, this opportunity to symbolically challenge an oppressive situation was galvanising and reinforced (or ignited) a desire to take political action outside the space in relation to issues of homelessness:

> *For me it was a real turning point. And now 18 months from then and I have been working for a number of charities, homelessness charities. But also in terms of the way I engaged with street homeless people and also the way that I engage with the number of people who were what we would describe as hidden homeless.* (AM110418)

> *...watching Cathy just made me realise the work that I will be doing with this R&D and hopefully... with my project and stuff, it is relevant and it is needed andwe desperately need more awareness in all pockets of the UK.* (CA300518)

> *Yeah – the things that I've been following up on mostly have been about renter's rights: tenancy rights and things like that.* (JP200718- joined Acorn, a campaigning organisation focussed on tenancy rights)

These interviewees directly connected their experience of *Cathy* to their subsequent social and political actions. As mentioned in chapter 5, the majority of the audience members I interviewed, and even the majority of those who took part in discussions or interventions I observed within the forums, had some previous experience or interest in issues surrounding homelessness. Indeed, for many, it was this interest that motivated them to attend the performance. This is something Cardboard Citizens are acutely aware of and are keenly invested in finding ways of reaching beyond audiences already engaged in the issue:

> *I do wonder whether all the people who turn up to Cardboard Citizens' shows, like Cathy, are already interested in homelessness. I mean they*

already know about it... how we can better overcome this? How do you not play to audiences that are already on your side, and preach to the converted? (Michael Chandler, Programme Director, Cardboard Citizens, interviewed 05.03.2018)

In terms of political efficacy, it is also important to note that the political aims of Cardboard Citizens for the second tour of *Cathy* and the *CitizensDo* campaign, were focussed on small- scale, personal actions. Actions suggested within *CitizensDo* included: donating to a food bank, buying the Big Issue, entering into conversations with local homeless people and joining local campaigning groups (like Acorn). These actions are a far cry from the revolutionary ambitions of Boal's original proposition. Indeed, some audience members were frustrated with the scale of change suggested:

> *… I regularly donate and support my foodbank. But am I just propping up a system? You know? If foodbanks are well stocked and welcoming, does that stop change from happening? On the one hand things we might actually do to help might actually be things that prop up the problem.* (SM200618)

This audience member attended the second, Forum Theatre version of *Cathy,* and they found the premise of the *CitizensDo* campaign (of motivating small scale actions on a personal and local level) frustrating. They wanted to see a much broader social change, and felt that making the experience of homelessness and destitution more bearable was in some ways regressive, as it made the situation as a whole seem more acceptable.

> *What's that famous proverb? Give someone a fish and you feed them for a day, teach them to fish and you feed them forever? You know what I mean. There is a wee element of that. Like what do we think we can do with these little moments of kindness? I'm not suggesting otherwise, we should be compassionate, but if we want to change these things we need bigger change…. sometimes feel like we're being laughed at, because those in power must love the fact that we think being outraged on Twitter somehow makes a difference… and you know, "listen to my voice because I've posted it on Twitter and that will really change things" – but it won't. So there's*

> *something about that – that we can make a difference it becomes very selfish, you know, that 'I'm doing my bit' – but it needs to be 'our bit': it needs to be a community response.* (SM200918)

The previous tour, which was framed as a Legislative Theatre piece, wished to directly address bigger policy changes to tackle the systemic issues Cathy faces within the piece, and may have better suited this audience members' approach. However, Legislative Theatre is also limited in that it depends upon the action of politicians, deferring responsibility away from the spect- actors gathered in the space. In reframing *Cathy* as a Forum Theatre piece, with the *CitizensDo* campaign accompanying it, Cardboard Citizens aimed to bring the power to act back to the spect-actors themselves, even if this meant change on a much smaller scale. Overall, the company acknowledge the political limitations and opportunities provided by each approach and believe that both are necessary in enacting change on the issue of homelessness.

6.3.1 Potential limitations of symbolism

Within both their Forum and Legislative Theatre work, Cardboard Citizens wish to see political impacts beyond the symbolic realm of the theatre space. "*I guess this is illustrating how calculating we are starting to have to be, in terms of how you make that journey from catalyst into action, and how you reinforce that journey…*" (Adrian Jackson, interviewed 26.02.2018, on the *CitizensDo* campaign). As well as a theatre company, Cardboard Citizens see themselves as a campaigning organisation, with the aim of effecting political change in tangible ways. This emphasis on tangible political effects is often set in opposition to a perceived lack of political value within symbolism.

The critiques of symbolism within Theatre of the Oppressed, and other prefigurative forms of activism, are similar. As briefly touched upon earlier in this chapter, it is difficult to quantify the political effects of symbolic gestures and this can be frustrating for campaigners and activists who wish to see more immediate political change. The symbolism of Theatre of the Oppressed can be helpful in terms of rehearsing alternatives and exploring the ways in which structural issues affect the lives of individuals. However, this process can become detached from the ultimate goal of political change, and (as admitted by Cardboard Citizens above)

often fails to reach beyond audiences and participants who already agree that change is needed. Whilst prefiguring and rehearsing a new society is important, this can "eclipse the need to communicate with the wider public and risks becoming a very limiting type of self-isolation" (Engler & Engler, 2014).

Iwan Brioc, a TO practitioner interviewed for this research, expressed frustration with the symbolic nature of various Legislative Theatre projects, as he believed it could undermine the potential political efficacy of the work. "*I think that the learning for me over the years has been that symbolic forms of political theatre are absolutely meaningless... It has to be about real change*" (Iwan Brioc, interviewed 02.03.18). For Iwan, 'real change' was not just about influencing policy (although this was an important part), but also the ways in which policy is implemented.

He spoke of *Rehearsals in Reality*, a Legislative Theatre project he worked on in Wales as part of the opening of The Senedd in Cardiff (described in chapter 3). The aim of the project was very much to effect policy decisions: the groups had clear policy goals which were based on the process of making the theatre pieces, and had ambitions to start conversations with the public and the Assembly Members (AM). However, for him, the project did not achieve its political aims:

> *What we were trying to do with Rehearsals in Reality was change reality. For me that the gold standard in what TO should be. Crossing the fourth wall and effecting a change: making reality. But in the end it was symbolic, it was just symbolic… Almost no AMs, except one or two, even stepped into the tent and watched a show. That's the interesting thing for me about all of this – the separation between the symbolic and the actual.* (Iwan Brioc, interviewed 02.03.18)

From Iwan's perspective, the AMs and civil servants of the Assembly did not see the project as an exercise in lobbying, or a valid form of political discourse, but as a community theatre project, which was socially valuable, but had no real role to play in policy-making.

Symbolism, for Iwan, impeded their political aims as it took the work further away from reality. He argues that "*symbolic forms of political theatre have left a credibility gap"*: policy-makers and NGOs were less likely to take theatre seriously as a means of effecting political decisions as it was only ever seen as a symbolic

exercise[59]. However, it is perhaps an exaggerated claim that the failure of policy-makers to take theatre seriously as a political form is down to 'symbolic forms of political theatre', as it is probable that many will not have engaged with either the 'merely symbolic' or any form of Legislative Theatre.

This rejection of symbolism within political theatre also leads back to a key question underlying this research: why should theatre play a role within democratic spaces at all? It is clear that theatre is not the most efficient or effective means of influencing policy change. This was true of Iwan's project, and was also true of *Cathy*. Over six hundred law and policy recommendations were collected across the country over the course of the first tour of *Cathy*. The piece was performed for local politicians, MPs around the country, at the House of Lords and at the Labour Party Conference. Yet, despite this impressive political reach, there is no clear evidence of these performances having impacted upon policy, as, for example, a lobbying group may have been able to.

In light of this debate, it is important to acknowledge the frequent exaggeration of the social and political potential of theatre. The transformative power of theatre can, at times, be overemphasised by both political theorists and theatre practitioners (Hammond & Ward, 2019; Mattern & Love, 2013; Ryan & Flinders, 2018), not least in Boal's own claim for Theatre of the Oppressed acting as a 'rehearsal for the revolution' (1979). These claims can set high and unrealistic expectations for practitioners, and fail to acknowledge the value of 'little changes'.

Michael Balfour (2009) argues "a theatre of 'little changes' provides a way to re-orientate what is possible about the work" and that the emphasis on social change above all possible aesthetic considerations can hollow the experience of theatre and leave "the artistic dimension relegated to the second division, a footnote to the value or purpose of the project" (p. 356). Forum and Legislative Theatre are not lobbying projects (although this goal sometimes plays a part), they are primarily artistic interventions and must be understood and valued on these terms. An

[59] It is important to note that Iwan did not see this issue extending to other approaches within TO, and that symbolism within these contexts could be of great value. However, *"Legislative Theatre is TO's tip of the spear and should pierce into realpolitik… Symbolism in this mix only serves to sabotage the bridging of the credibility gap."* (Iwan Brioc, email exchange 5th March 2020).

expectation that these forms should directly and tangibly influence policy-making is, usually, unrealistic.

This reflects a similar debate within literary genre of new nature writing. As Oakley, Ward and Christie (2018) argue, “engagement with new nature writing can produce meaningful effects… these effects are emergent or indeterminate, and thus have their own power and potential which cannot be reduced to, for example, its social or economic contexts.” (p. 704). They refer to MacFarlane’s claim that “its effects in encouraging activism may become apparent only in retrospect ‘or even remain unseen’.” (p. 6969). In exploring the value of Forum and Legislative Theatre practice, it is important to acknowledge that “what applied theatre does is not always linear, rational and conclusive in its outcomes, but is more often messy, incomplete, complex and tentative” (Balfour, 2009, p. 357). The value of participatory theatre, in itself and in terms of its potential role as a democratic spaces is not contingent on its ability to influence policy.

Both of the case studies explored in this thesis failed to achieve tangible policy impact (indeed, *We Know Not* did not even try to influence policy). However, there is also significant evidence from these case studies that shows other forms of political value, in terms of the other key elements of democratic spaces. In this research I have found that, often, the aesthetic value of participatory theatre is crucial to its political value: often, the same elements which make this work artistically compelling and distinctive are the same elements which create a distinctive and useful democratic space. The symbolism present in *Cathy* plays an important aesthetic role as well as a complex political one, which contributes to the political imagination of the spect- actors, as well as their political confidence.

6.4 Conclusion

As outlined in chapter 2, a useful democratic space must be inclusive, enable listening and exchange, focussed on the common good, encourage imagination and belief in alternative, and have a degree of political efficacy. In concluding this chapter I will draw together the role of symbolism and expertise within *Cathy,* with this framework for a useful democratic space, particularly in terms of inclusivity, listening, imagination and political efficacy.

Valuing alternative approaches to political expression is an important way to create

an **inclusive** democratic space. A key part of creating an inclusive space is ensuring not only a diverse range of voices in the space, but creating a space in which everyone feels able to express themselves (Pateman, 2012). As explored above, the forums of *Cathy* created spaces which allowed for symbolic gestures of anger and frustration. These were also political expressions, they expressed the 'need to make a stand' (Field notes, 01.05.2018), anger, frustration and the need for change.

Within the forums of *Cathy* personal experience was particularly valued as a form of expertise. These forms of expression sat alongside more traditional, technical and theoretical forms of expertise. This is important in terms of creating an **inclusive** space, as there were multiple ways in which to express political views. The encouragement and facilitation of a broad range of modes of expression within the forums of *Cathy* supported the inclusivity of the space.

In terms of enabling exchange and creating a space for **listening**, many in the audience, when speaking about what they remember or learned from the performance, spoke of the contributions from other audience members. The first half of any Forum or Legislative Theatre performance the space is divided between passive spectators and active performers, as the play itself is performed. However, the second half allows the spect-actors to take centre stage. Much of the information, motivations and emotional moments which stayed with audiences in the weeks and months after the performance came from other audience members. This suggests that there was meaningful listening between audience members, as well as to the actors who occupied the more traditional role of imparting knowledge in the first half.

Imagination and a belief in alternatives is particularly relevant in terms of the use of symbolic gesture in Forum and Legislative Theatre. *Cathy's* symbolic nature allowed the audience to model and play with alternatives and, through rehearsing these alternatives, also offered a more tangible sense of their plausibility in real life, outside the theatre. The symbolic act of the intervention first provides an opportunity to enter the space of 'meaning-making' and casts those who are ordinarily passive (the spectator) as protagonists with the power to alter the reality of the play. Secondly, the intervention rehearses an alternative, allows discussion and reflection upon this intervention. Both of these elements are symbolic, and

essentially imaginative exercises, and are important to creating a useful democratic space, in terms of testing and imagining alternatives.

The **political efficacy** of *Cathy* in terms of symbolism and expertise is complex. In terms of policy influence, the piece had little tangible impact. Furthermore, as Iwan Brioc argues, the symbolic nature of some examples of Legislative Theatre (*Cathy* included) can undermine the potential for theatre to influence policy in a tangible and direct way, as policy-makers see the form as being somewhat irrelevant to the task of policy-making. This is a significant limitation of participatory theatre as a democratic space, which will be returned to in chapters 8 and 9.

However, in considering other forms of political efficacy, such as political literacy (public opinion/understanding of key issue) and political confidence (influence on participants self- perception as political actors – e.g. activists or citizens), *Cathy* was more successful. There is evidence which suggests the advancement of political literacy around specific social issues: *Cathy* provided a space for learning about homelessness and precarity in a way which allowed audiences to exchange information and insights. A number of audience members also commented on having gained insight into the emotional experience of homelessness, as well as technical information relating to policy and practical support available on the local or national level. Political confidence was also supported in the forums of *Cathy*, amongst other things, through the symbolic gesture of becoming spect-actors: stepping onto the stage to change oppressive situations, and to enter the space of meaning-making. In the forum, spect- actors play an active role in the shaping of the political and social realities of *Cathy.* A number of audience members commented on feelings of 'empowerment'[60] as a result of this invitation.

Overall, Boal's claim for a 'rehearsal of revolution' (1979) cannot be applied to *Cathy*. The forums of *Cathy* often focussed on small changes or emotional expression, and whilst conversations which followed often expressed the broader political aims of more public housing, rent controls and community land trusts, they did not often speak of total system change or revolution. Furthermore, there are significant limitations in terms of the potential policy impact of this approach

[60] This was a commonly used word in my interviews by audience members.

to democratic spaces. However, through reimagining who and how we are able to express ourselves politically, and symbolically demonstrating social change, the forums of *Cathy* does offer distinctive opportunities in terms of creating new approaches to democratic spaces.

Chapter 7: Performance, liminality and conversations in *We Know Not What We May Be* by METIS

In this chapter I will be focussing on METIS' production of *We Know Not What We May Be* at the Barbican Centre, which was performed from the 4th to 9th of September 2018. As mentioned in chapter 4, this was a performance installation, rather than a play in a traditional sense, in which the audience became 'factory workers' in the Factory of the Future. Zoe Svendsen, the artistic director of METIS, describes the work as participatory theatre. In so doing she refers to the participatory nature of the experience: the audience are actively involved in the action of the piece throughout the performance. Due to its participatory nature, *We Know Not What We May Be* was created (in part) through a series of workshops, which invited participants to test different elements which would go on to make-up the installation. Their ideas and feedback were essential to the creation of the piece. The focus of this chapter is the final installation and, specifically, the nature of the audience interaction within the piece, rather than the process of its creation, although occasionally I do reference exit interviews from test performances and workshops (which were very similar in form and content to the September performances).

In this chapter I will be exploring the liminal quality of *We Know Not What We May Be* (hereafter known as *We Know Not*) and how the liminality of the piece relates to its potential as a useful democratic space. In this chapter I will be drawing on Victor Turners' understanding of liminality as a state 'betwixt and between' states of being (1967). I will begin this chapter with an explanation of how I will be using the term liminality and its relationship with performance studies. I will then turn my attention to *We Know Not,* examining how the design and performance elements of the piece created a liminal space, and the ways in which the audience responded to this. Throughout this chapter's examination of liminality and audience experience, I will be returning to the five key elements of a democratic space (inclusivity, listening, common good, imagination and political efficacy) as outlined in previous chapters. Overall, this chapter argues that the liminal quality of *We Know Not* enabled the audience to: enter a fictional world, which enabled a different kind of reflection on current political realities; to feel as though they were

a part of a larger movement, thereby supporting a sense of collectively; enabled a spirit of playfulness and, through this, encouraged meaningful conversations with strangers about complex political issues.

This chapter will also argue that certain aspects of the design and performance techniques, which contributed to the liminal quality of *We Know Not,* were alienating for some audiences. They felt overwhelmed and confused by the complex nature of the piece, and unable to engage, thereby limiting the inclusivity of the installation. However, as I will go on to argue later in this chapter, this complexity was also a key feature of the piece's political value in terms of supporting other elements of a useful democratic space.

7.1 Ritual, Liminality & Performance

Victor Turner describes liminality as a "realm of pure possibility" (1967, p. 97), which, in many ways, is precisely what METIS were trying to achieve in making *We Know Not*: a realm in which audiences could step outside current realities to experiment with possible futures. For their audiences *"there was a sense of possibility"* (HJ270918). In defining liminality, Turner borrowed from Arnold van Gennep's work on 'rites of passage' ([1909] 1960), and Turner initially used the term in relation to rituals performed by tribes in Namibia. For both Turner and van Gennep, a liminal state is the "threshold" moment within rituals between 'separation and reincorporation' (Turner, 1967). In this liminal state one has left behind a former reality, but has not yet entered a new one (e.g. the process of ritual to demarcate a shift from childhood to adulthood).

Beyond reflecting on ritual practices, Turner, and many other thinkers, explored liminality as a part of social and cultural change more broadly, arguing that processes of change require a state outside of structural norms, before entering into new norms. Turner argues that through liminal experiences we generate "a plurality of alternative models for living, from utopias to programmes, which are capable of influencing mainstream social and political roles" (Turner & Turner, 1982, p. 33). With this 'plurality of alternative models for living' we may choose to live in a different way. Within liminal spaces, what may have been considered unrealistic, or even impossible, becomes a valid alternative.

Contained within Turner's understanding of liminality is an implicit assumption that

some kind of transformation occurs between the beginning and end of the liminal experience. For example, from childhood to adulthood, or from one set of values to another. However, the transformation implied by liminality needn't be total or radical. It could be as simple as experiencing the world from a different perspective, or coming to understand something in a new way.

Liminality has also been linked to theatre practice (Schechner, 1993, 2013; Turner, 1982). Turner regularly used theatrical techniques within his anthropological teaching and research to embody the cultures and rituals which he and his colleagues were studying. For example, he once enlisted the entire Anthropology department at the University of Chicago to enact a New England wedding. Staff and students were cast in various roles, family trees were studied in advance and a wedding was enacted, from the rehearsal dinner to the wedding breakfast the day after (Turner & Turner, 1982). They argued that this "kinetic understanding" allows those involved in the performance an "inside view engendered in and through performance, [which] becomes a powerful critique of how ritual and ceremonial structures are cognitively represented" (p.34). I would argue that this performance in itself was a liminal experience for participants: they entered into a ritualistic and fictional reality, quite separate from their everyday lived experience. Whilst this performance of a wedding did not contain the kind of transformation of real matrimony, through the experience, Turner argued that the participants understood New England weddings from a different perspective, formed deeper relationships with colleagues, and explored alternative teaching and research methods (ibid.).

Richard Schechner, a theatre maker, academic and long-time collaborator of Victor Turner (and also Augusto Boal), argued that the "performance process and the ritual process outlined by van Gennep and elaborated by Turner (throughout his work) are strictly analogous" (Schechner, 1985, p. 193). He speaks of the ritualistic nature of his own theatre practice in using repetition, gesture and the blurring of the boundaries between performer and spectator. It is important to emphasise here that Schechner's argument is not that they are *synonymous*, but *analogous.* In a panel discussion between theatre maker Simon McBurney and the indigenous artist Takumã Kuikuro they drew a clear distinction between performance and ritual (even when the gestures and sounds may be identical). Kuikuro argued that "ritual

has always existed, and we are just repeating it. However, theatre requires imagination, it is made" (McBurney, Kuikuro, Heritage, Du Cann, & Appignanesi, 2020). He is alluding here to the religious nature of ritual, as well as its relationship with historic traditions, which separates it from theatre.

Whilst Schechner makes a clear demarcation between performance and ritual, both Turner and Schechner lose this clarity throughout their work in distinguishing between liminality and ritual and at times, the terms 'ritual' and 'liminality' become almost interchangeable. In this thesis, I am interested in the connection between liminality and theatre performances, and will not be drawing on the concept of ritual. However, to create a liminal experience, ritual uses gesture, sound, specific spatial design and an assembled group with roles to play, in order to create a collective, temporal experience which sits outside of everyday reality. As Schechner (1985) points out, these same techniques are often used within theatre, also to create a liminal experience. I shall argue in this chapter that METIS makes use of these techniques in creating *We Know Not*.

Gembus (2018) explores the importance of the liminal nature of performance practice in terms of its social and political role. He offers a case study of a performance group made up of (mostly) second generation Somalian teenagers. Arguing that through the creation and performance a series of plays within their community allowed "the seriousness of the conflicts young people experience to be partially subverted through playfulness, made safer through humour and being one step removed from reality even if that distance is narrow and porous" (Gembus, 2018, p. 442). The nature of theatre being 'removed from reality' allowed for more difficult conversations within the community to happen safely (e.g. conflicting perspectives on relationships between genders between different generations). Gembus draws on Turner to argue that these performances allowed the community to see "the reality behind the role playing mask" (Turner, 1982, p. 155), and created a playful space in which to have serious and difficult conversations. This also relates back to arguments made in chapter 5, in relation to *Cathy,* regarding the importance of playfulness and humour in political discourse, both in terms of inclusivity and imagining alternatives (Duncombe, 2007; Prentki, 2015).

In this chapter I will argue that *We Know Not* by METIS created a similar kind of

liminal experience for audiences, and that this liminality offered a unique and significant contribution to the pieces' political role as a democratic space. In creating a liminal experience, *We Know Not* offered a useful distance from everyday reality. As explored later in this chapter, this distance also allowed for contentious political conversations to be addressed with strangers in a safe and unpressured way, and invited audiences to contribute radical and imaginative ideas for the future without the constraints of real-life plausibility. I shall now turn my attention to how METIS created a liminal space through the design and performance technique of the piece, and audience responses to this.

7.2 Creating liminality: design and performance technique in We Know Not

The liminal quality of *We Know Not* was created in a number of ways both within the theatrical design of the space (i.e. lighting, set, sound and setting), and through the performance techniques of the piece (i.e. the live performances and the roles given to the audience). The liminality of the piece helped to facilitate political conversations between audience members and offered a sense of playfulness and 'otherworldly-ness'. However, for some, the liminal quality of the space was alienating and made engagement with the piece, and the ideas within it, very difficult.

A common theme emerging from my fieldwork with *We Know Not* was the significance of the design in creating the mood of the installation space. Careful attention was given to each element of design in the 'Factory of the Future'. The lighting was low and atmospheric and designed to draw attention to specific sites within the installation. For example, in the first half of the space, 'The 2020s', where the audience would sit at large round tables and discuss policy suggestions, pendant lights hung down in the centre of the table – this subtly encouraged those sat around the table to lean into the light and brought the focus directly to the conversation on the table and away from distractions around the room.

Contrastingly, the sound was disruptive and, somewhat ominous. Every 7 minutes a loud buzzer would sound, which told the audience they were allowed to move from one table to another if they wished. A mechanical soundscape played throughout, maintaining a feeling of being within a factory, and created a driving sense of urgency and an awareness of the passage of time. This was intentional:

Zoe Svendsen, the director of the piece, wanted the sound to encourage the feeling that these conversations and policy decisions were urgent and immediate political matters, rather than something to mull on in a relaxed or unhurried manner.

There was a muted and natural colour scheme for the set itself: undyed paper and cardboard covered the space. This 'low-tech', natural aesthetic was interrupted with highly technical projection mapping and a small hydroponic greenhouse growing salad. These 'high-tech' installation pieces were predominately in the second half of the installation, in 'The 2040s', which heightened the sense of going into the future. The design was also highly responsive to the input of audiences: much of the content of the installation was contributed by past audiences. For example, between 'The 2020s' and 'The 2040s' was a tunnel, lit with lightbulbs starting with the original Edison lightbulb, right up to the latest energy saving bulb, which was to create a sense of travelling forward in time as the audience walked through the tunnel and under these lights. This tunnel was lined with policies which previous audiences had voted through in the 2020s, the idea being that they were now being implemented and lived with in the 2040s. Therefore, as the installation progressed over the 5 days it was open to audiences, more and more elected policies lined the walls of the tunnel. When the audience emerged, they were in the 2040s, where the task was to explore the impact these policy decisions had made on society.

As this description demonstrates, the physical design of the space itself encouraged engagement and responded to the input of audiences. This is noteworthy in terms of this investigation into the creation of democratic spaces. The design of the space was crucial to the audience experience of the piece and the set design of *We Know Not* explicitly invited democratic engagement. As one audience member noted:

> *…there was this democratic process within the design, which I thought was very clever. And there was almost the play space of – you know, the emerging theoretical city? And the emerging theoretical social structures which were the result of that. So it was almost like seeing a democratic process happening in real time.* (CS251018)

The effect of all of this, the lighting, sound and set, was overwhelming for the audience as they first entered the space: a busy hive of activity in which everyone

seemed to have a task to attend to. For many in the audience this was intimidating at first, an "*assault to the senses"* (Exit interview 040918), and it was difficult to understand how to fit into this melee. "*I could see people were confused, the introduction was confusing. But it is also an exciting space and one in which you very quickly buy into the game"* (Exit Interviews 080918). For most audiences, once they began to understand their own role within the Factory, this feeling subsided and they became a part of the installation. The significance of 'buying into the game' and becoming part of the installation in terms of creating a sense of collectively (i.e. a collective working together for a shared goal), and the political potential of this in terms of democratic space will be a recurring theme in this chapter.

A great deal of artistic attention went into creating this piece, and it is this attention which sets it apart from future building workshops or citizen assembly meetings. It is important to reinforce here that METIS' *primary* intention was to create a theatrical installation, and this aesthetic care was of value to the audience and encouraged them to engage with the installation, and to feel their engagement was meaningful. *"Because I really, really honoured and respected the fact that you could see the tremendous amount of effort had gone into the form of this"* (JR081018). Or *"You know, for example, even at the level of the cards being on decent paper. They felt like they had quality and they were going to actually mean something. That does matter."* (CS251018)

The purpose of the space was not only to encourage conversation or to raise awareness around key issues, it was to create a space which brought us outside of reality and into a fictional world. The experience of the piece was frequently described by audiences as feeling very separate from everyday life, and the design was a significant factor in this for many audiences. For example, as one audience member commented: "*I feel like I've been somewhere, somewhere that's a good thing. It has taken me away from routine*" (Exit Interview 060918). Similarly, in the weeks after the performance, another commented:

> *…there was a sense of possibility. And because you were kind of – even though you knew it was just cardboard attached to the walls – you imagined it had actually happened. And I suppose that's where it's engaging in the*

> *actual theatre of it. Rather than just, um, the present.* (HJ270918 – this quote refers to the tunnel with policies voted through by audiences, positioned between 'The 2020s' and 'The 2040s', as mentioned above)

These reflections touch upon the significance, and excitement, of entering a space which feels separate to an everyday experience. This separation from everyday reality is crucial to theatre, and crucial to liminality. For Turner, liminality is "a temporary breach of structure whereby the familiar may be stripped of certitude and the normative unhinged, an interlude wherein conventional social, economic and political life may be transcended" (St John, 2008, p. 5). The quotes above suggest that the design of the piece was a significant contributor creating this environment. In terms of creating a democratic space, this liminal position, away from everyday reality, allows us to create visions of the future which are less hindered by current political realities. As set out in previous chapters, democracy requires us to imagine alternatives
- without visions of an alternative future, it is difficult to believe in political change. The liminality of *We Know Not* helps to facilitate this imaginative process as it sets up a fictional space in which normal political constraints are not present. In liminal spaces "rather than ignoring or dismissing hunches or new ideas of acting, in this realm people can act on them. They actively consider the possibilities for constructing new cultural resources and altering strategies of action" (Grenville, Golden-Biddle, Irwin, & Mao, 2011). For many audience members in *We Know Not,* there was this sense of possibility, and, as I shall explore later in this chapter, this also played a role in the types of conversations which audience members had within the installation.

The performance technique used in *We Know Not*, in terms of how the audience were led into the space and their interactions with performers, were also effective tools in creating a liminal space and a 'separation from the everyday'[61]. For example, "*I remember that we were given our own bags – so we had to leave stuff, so it felt a bit like entering a separate space, which I liked. I liked that demarcation*" (CM231018). In the foyer, when the audience arrived, METIS took away their bags and they were given 'factory worker bags'. Everyone in the space, performers and

[61] Audiences were invited into a fictional space, to perform a fictional role, separate from everyday realities.

audience alike, wore these bags. This offered the audience a kind of costume and cast them as workers in the factory. Offering a costume piece to audiences is a technique often used within participatory performance. It makes clear to the audience the character they will be representing in the piece, which is a useful in terms of their potential interactions with performers and their role/goal within the piece. In *We Know Not* it was made clear to the audience that they were factory workers, and they would be doing a shift in the Factory of the Future. They were also told which generation they were a part of and were frequently reminded of this (they had to put their generation number down each time they voted or wrote comments in 'the 2020s'). The factory worker bags also added to the aesthetic of the space once they had entered the Factory of the Future: it included the audience themselves with the colour scheme and created a collective uniformity between individual audience members and other 'Factory Workers'.

Once they had been given their costumes, the audience were led down a warren of corridors and into a large scene dock area behind the stage. "*And I remember that we had to enter through quite a rabbit warren style route. I really liked that because it was quite a nice feeling – it was quite an unusual space, but it also felt quite creative"* (CM231018). In this area they listened to a 10 minute talk by an expert, who spoke on a topic related to the themes of the piece: namely climate crisis and future policy-making. For example, in different slots, the Head of Oceans for Greenpeace spoke on plastic waste, and Paul Mason spoke on rentierism and the creative commons. Many audience members commented on this talk as a kind of "*warm-up*" or "*getting them in the mood*" for the Factory of the Future (various exit interviews, 0918). After 10 minutes, a loud bell tolled, signalling the beginning of the audiences' shift and a huge double door creaked open, revealing the Factory of the Future. In the Factory the audience were greeted by performers, and saw previous 'generations' of audiences still busy discussing and voting on policies in 'the 2020s' and in 'the 2040s'.

It is important to note the significance of this sense of generations of audiences working before the audience arrived and others continuing after they left. The piece was durational, lasting at least 4 hours per evening, and longer at the weekends, with at least 4 generations of audiences coming through the space. This sense of ongoing and constant activity was important. A number of audience members

commented on this: *"I liked that there was a sense of activity having happened before we came in that would continue after we left."* (Exit Interview 030518), and *"That almost – that I was doing this for the next generation, I was making these decisions for the next generation, rather than my generation"* (DdM251018).

Some audience members even used the technique of waiting for a new generation to lobby them toward particular policy suggestions: *"I re-wrote a whole scenario and got people to vote for it. Then waited for the youngsters to come in and then got them to vote for it!"* (Exit interview 060918). The use of the term 'youngsters' in this quote is interesting, the new 'generation' of factory workers who arrived after this audience member were not actually younger, however they were the generation to come after. This portrays the extent to which the language and performativity of the space influenced audiences' experience and reflections on the piece.

There was a sense of being a part of something bigger than the individual, which existed both before and after one's time in the space. This was a very deliberate choice. METIS wished to offer a sense of the scale of issues like climate crisis, but also to demonstrate that this was not something which could, or should, be solved by one individual, but through a collective effort:

> *And that was deliberate: we called the audience 'generations' so that they – to invite them to imagine themselves a part of a bigger whole. And the reason for calling it a FACTORY of the Future as well, which was so that you didn't imagine you had to solve the whole thing yourself, but instead you could work away on your element. And then it would add up.* (Zoe Svendsen, Artistic Director of METIS, 29th November 2018)

This sense of 'being a part of a bigger whole' relates to a key element of creating a democratic space: a sense of the common good. The prevailing Schumpeterian view of democracy, as explored in chapter 2, is the notion that the democratic system works as a simple aggregation of individual preferences based on the manipulation and persuasion of politicians, according to rational self-interest. In this version of democracy we are consumers using our vote to choose between competing brands (i.e. political parties) (Schumpeter, [1942] 1976). As argued in previous chapters, in order to overcome this limited notion of democracy there must

be a sense of collectivity. Within useful democratic spaces, citizens understand themselves to be working toward a common good, for the collective, rather than an aggregation of personal interests.

In contrast to the Schumpeterian approach, the discourse within *We Know Not* emphasised the notion of the common good:

> *We're all different people, we all have different experience and we come to these things from a different angle... [In the piece there was] a spark about how we – about why things are the way they are – and what I can do in order to change that for the better. And for as many of us as humanly possible... When you're thinking about it from the perspective of 'what would be best for everybody' as well. That does make a difference.* (RA280919)

We Know Not was focussed on creating policy which would benefit all in society, and, crucially, this was not limited to the present generation. *"It made us think about longevity of decisions rather than practice... and to aim for the BEST possible, not practical or immediate solutions*" (Exit interview, 080918). The structure of the installation created a relationship between past and future generations. For example, Generation 5 (the fifth audience group to go through the installation) could read, and often responded to, the amendments and comments of members of Generations 1, 2, 3 and 4. Generation 5 may even add the final votes needed to pass a policy championed by Generation 2. This generation will also leave their own comments and questions behind for future generations. METIS collected and stored all of the comment and policy cards from the installation. In going through them it is clear that conversations did not only take place around tables, they also took place in written form, across generations of audiences. This performance technique makes an important political point in thinking about democracy, as Arendt argues, the current generation must recognize their responsibility to future generations in making policy decisions (Arendt, [1959] 2019). This is particularly present in contemporary discourse around climate crisis[62] (Anderson, 2018; Caney, 2019; Davies, 2017), which was also the primary

[62] Numerous essays within the CUSP essay series have emphasised the importance of considering future generations within current decision-making around climate policy. The 'challenge of the long-term' (Caney, 2019) is a key consideration in democratic theory, particularly in relation to issues of sustainability.

context of *We Know Not.*

In terms of interaction with the performers, there was not a lot of facilitation in the space: the performers had specific tasks, and in 'the 2020s' the performers mostly left the audience on their own to discuss ideas, vote and amend. However, there were artistic associates in the space who did guide the audience:

> *...you wanted to give them stuff, but not give them too much. So, I guess, essentially, not dictate to them exactly what needs to be done but also help them out if they start to feel a little bit lost along that process. ... So I guess, it was trying to be aware of that and trying to be responsive to that as much as we could.* (RA280919)

Crucially, the performers were not facilitators, they were in character as workers in the Factory of the Future. This reinforced the sense of otherworldliness in the piece, and also the playfulness of the piece. Their inputs were often humorous, and given the serious issues the piece addressed, this offered the audience some comic relief. The audience particularly interacted with the performers in the 2040s, as they helped to model how the policy decisions made the 2020s had effected the 2040s. For example, the audience could tune into a live radio show, performed by the actors, in which they did a comedic 'retrospective' of the present from the perspective of the 'new normal' of the 2040s. Audiences enjoyed the humour of this, as well as a chance to listen and reflect: *"imagining looking back allowed me to reflect on present*" (Exit interview 080918), and *"I really enjoyed the radio show. It was funny and a nice moment to just sit and listen after so much talking."* (Exit interview, 050918)

This use of humour also touches upon the importance of the playfulness of the space. Fundamentally, its positionality as a theatre experience, rather than a workshop or citizens assembly, makes the piece a form of entertainment or leisure. *We Know Not* was participatory and therefore invited the audience to play an active role in creating their own experience, which, for many, was playful and fun, despite the serious issues being addressed. For example, the audience commented that *"Having it in this context, it feels more like fun than work"* (Exit interview, 060918), and that *"It felt like a playground"* (Exit interview, 090918).

This playfulness was a crucial part of the piece and depended on the audience's

engagement. This relates back to the balance between seduction and provocation required within participatory theatre, as well as the importance of playfulness within this kind of work (Duncombe, 2007; Jackson, 2009). For the audience to engage they must feel it is important and necessary: the provocation in the case of *We Know Not* was the scale and political importance of the issues addressed, enacted in part by the speakers at the beginning as well as the topics of the policy suggestions within the 2020s. However, it is also important, particularly in theatrical situations like this, for the audience to feel it is fun to engage: the seduction in the case of *We Know Not* was this playfulness. It created an opportunity for the audience to play make-believe as a 'Factory Worker' and, in this role, enjoy comical interactions with performers in the space, and play with the materials around them.

The opportunity to play is important to both liminality and a process of social change. The spirit of play within *We Know Not* allowed the audience to explore complex and difficult issues in a light-hearted and enjoyable way. Similarly to the case of the theatre project with Somalian teenagers (mentioned above), which enabled the participants to bring up difficult conversations within their community, the context of *We Know Not* invited audiences to discuss serious social issues, without fear of embarrassment, or feeling too exposed. For example, in one exit interview an older woman spoke of how strongly she felt for these issues, but how she never felt able to bring them up with her friends or family for fear of being "*too earnest*" (Exit interview 060918). The guise of playfulness, and perhaps the role of theatre as being a space of make-believe, seems to protect participants from being too exposed and, in this way, allows them to open up more fully, more safely. As Gembus (2018) says of the Somalian youth theatre troupe, this work can enable us to see 'the reality behind the role playing mask'.

In *We Know Not,* audience members were offered a space to talk about issues they didn't often speak about, in ways which were more idealistic, 'earnest' or optimistic than they would normally approach them with. For example, many audience members commented: *"Conversations like this don't usually happen, like extend out to climate change, or how we create a holistic system"* (Exit interviews 060918); *"I found it so valuable to be given a space to discuss possibilities – it was very uplifting and positive"* (Exit interviews 070918) or *"things like this are so*

important because we need optimism to think about the future properly. Maybe we think about current affairs, but never about the future" (Exit interviews 060918). Within workshops I observed:

> *These exercises [testing elements of performance] immediately lead to interesting conversations about the state of the world and how to change it. It also loosens up the group, people are already laughing and suggesting silly things, e.g. "Get rid of all dog poo and chicken bones."* (Field notes from workshop 26.03.2018)

As these quotes and observations demonstrate, the activity of *We Know Not* opened up serious political conversations, whilst maintaining a playful atmosphere.

Overall, both the design and performative elements of *We Know Not* were crucial to the liminal nature of the space: they 'problematized the familiar' (Grenville et al., 2011, p. 525), and created a space of possibility. The performative and design elements created a fictional and playful world for the audience, which explicitly sought to question our current reality from an external perspective. In this world alternatives were eminently possible.

7.2.1 Confusion and alienation

However, as touched upon above, the initial entry into the Factory of the Future was overwhelming and often confusing for the audience as they struggled to find their place within the piece. Instructions from performers were complex and the surroundings distracting. "*I didn't understand the rules as it was too difficult to take it all in at once*" (Exit interview, 060918).

It is important to note that the overwhelming nature of the space was perhaps a key feature of provoking a sense of liminality. Grenville et al. (2011) speak of using shock tactics and fear to as a common approach to provoking liminal experiences. Many audience members commented on the overwhelming nature of entering the Factory of the Future: it was a lot to take in and immediately demanded your attention to be taken away from outside reality and into the space.

> *There was this weird 10-minute period when it was confusing and bit scary, which was this weird mixture of emotions which ran from 'what is this' to 'am I going to do this right'. Performance anxiety. Am I going to*

> *understand the rules? What am I supposed to do? Ahhh! That kind of feeling. And when you felt you got it and you were just- actually the subject matter took over, as in: should we remove ourselves from nature or not?* [a policy suggestion in the space], *and BOOM: you were in the flow.* (CS251018)

Whilst this audience member did manage to get ‘in the flow’ of the piece, other audience members could not get past this sense of confusion and ‘performance anxiety’. For them, the complexity of the piece was alienating and they felt unable to engage. The piece depended upon audience members being confident enough to take their own initiative in seeking out new parts of the installation, as well as accepting a feeling confusion whilst they found their own way through the piece:

> *And just by chance, as we were walking through the corridor we asked someone ‘well, where are you going’ and she said ‘oh, I’m going to listen to a radio show’, and I was like ‘What radio show!?’ we knew nothing about it. Which we – just because we bumped into her was the only way we knew about it. I think somewhere there was a big gap in explaining… so it was all a bit complicated.* (AC081018)

And:

> *But the whole process was a bit confusing… the talk and struggling to grasp the point and maybe feeling a bit like you didn’t get it and that other people had. And then like going into a room where other people got what was going on and I didn’t. And I was just like: WHAT IS GOING ON?* (MCTJM161018)

In my exit interviews, I found a number of audience members went into the installation and then left quite quickly afterwards. Comments from these audience members were often negative, stating ‘*it was not for us’*, or *‘it was not what I expected’*. Contrastingly, those who stayed longer in the space generally reported a more positive experience: having given time to being confused and then managing to get beyond this state and into ‘the flow’ of the piece. Almost all the audience members I spoke with reported feeling confused or overwhelmed at the beginning of the piece. For some, this was impossible to overcome and left them feeling unable to engage, whilst others managed to get past this, and even enjoy

those initial overwhelming feelings. This presents a barrier for engagement and limits the inclusivity of the space. Creating an environment which is open and accessible for all, and also one in which everyone feels able to contribute is a key element of the democratic space. In many ways, *We Know Not* did not create an entirely inclusive[63] space, as a number of audience members felt unable to contribute to the discussions or engage with the piece.

Facilitation was quite minimal in the Factory of the Future. As mentioned earlier, the performers, who may have performed this function, were in character and their role was not to guide audiences through the installation. Indeed, for some audience members, the performers further obfuscated the rules and expectations of the piece:

> *I just didn't feel it was explained well enough. I don't know if we were just unlucky with the actor sitting on our table – she was having an off day or whatever, but it just didn't it just all seemed very random... It was like we weren't talking to the right person.* (AC081018)

The overwhelming nature of the piece and its complexity made it a frustrating experience for some audiences, who found it very difficult to engage with the piece – and for some this even meant leaving almost immediately after entering the space. This limits its inclusivity and therefore, also limits *We Know Not*'s potential as a useful democratic space.

It is important to emphasise that whilst this may undermine its democratic value, this does not necessarily undermine its quality as an artistic piece. The ambiguity and complexity of the installation was an artistic choice, and, for METIS, it was one with an important political point:

> *...the only reason to narrow it down would be to make it more comprehensible or accessible or something. But actually any given audience are only taking one path through, they're not looking at all of it. And I think the idea is to make them feel like they are part of... it was less about specific content and more about being part of something.* (Zoe

[63] It is difficult to set specific measures for how accessible and welcoming a space must be before it can be understood as fully 'inclusive'. As mentioned in chapter 4, the framework of the useful democratic space used within this thesis is an idealised vision to aim towards, rather than a readily achievable goal.

Svendsen, 29th November 2019)

The creators of *We Know Not* were aware of the complexity of the piece, and also the difficulty some audiences had with engaging with it, as this frequently came up in development workshops. The complexity was entirely intentional and aimed to reflect the scale and interconnected nature of the economic, political and environmental issues touched upon in the piece. Again, for some in the audience, this was acknowledged and enjoyed: "*It is complex because the piece is about complex things. It is not simplified. It tries to show all of it.*" (Exit Interview, 040918). However, others felt frustrated at being tasked with looking at an element of the issue[64] which they were not interested in or knowledgeable about. *"Then I felt that I was being stupid – Because I didn't understand, which made me not want to [take part]."* (AV081018). This compounded their more general confusion and difficulty with the piece.

Furthermore, to the aversion of some audience members, the structure of the piece consciously withheld pay-offs, rewards for participation or narrative conclusions, which many expect when going to the theatre. For some, this made the piece feel incomplete (*"it didn't feel very polished"* AC081018). In the last chapter we spoke of catharsis in relation to *Cathy* by Cardboard Citizens. In *We Know Not,* METIS actively withheld catharsis from the audience – this was again an artistic choice which served a larger political purpose regarding motivations for political action and momentum for campaigns.

> *[There are] all these careful attempts to reward people for their participation and in this event we're trying to do that without – not to reward people... Because if you reward people, you play into that consumer system of delivery and what we want – I think by the end – I think it took a couple of days to get going, but I think by the end of the installation there was a sense of the motor of the Factor of the Future which had gone on before you and would go on after you.* (Zoe Svendsen, 29th November 2019)

[64] Within the installation it was arranged so that the policy proposals in circulation at the time of entry were related to the talk which that audience 'generation' had attended. For example, those who attended Paul Mason's 'rentierism' talk were given policy proposals related to private and public ownership systems.

This is a piece still in development and finding the balance between the complexities of the piece, audience engagement and withholding catharsis is ongoing. It is important to note that METIS' primary intention, as artists, was not to create an inclusive workshop or citizens assembly, but to create an artwork. An artwork which aimed to facilitate discussion between strangers and push its audiences to imagine alternatives:

> *I was trying to create a kind of structure in which the imagining of possibilities would become possible. And not one in which we as 'so called specialist – specialist imaginers' (as in artists, writers, performers, directors) would – um – imagine something for the audience, but instead a space in which it becomes possible for all of us to step into that space of the imagination.* (ibid.)

Therefore, it was important for the piece to include a broad range of audience members and to create a space in which they felt able to engage. At times, this piece failed to achieve that inclusive aim in service of making a piece which embraced, and even emphasised, the complexity of the political issues it addressed, in both form and content. These two aims seemed to at odds with one another.

However, I would argue that METIS' commitment to representing this complexity, and encouraging audiences to embrace feelings of confusion and make space for ambiguity has great political value in itself. *We Know Not* challenged its audiences to enter a space in which they felt initially uncomfortable, address issues with strangers which they (often) had little or no prior experience with, and have minimal immediate pay-offs for their labour. Interestingly, this experience is not unlike other kinds of democratic spaces like citizens' assemblies or campaigning groups, in which a group of strangers come together to address an issue/associated issues – often with minimal immediate political impact. Therefore, in some ways, the frustrating nature of *We Know Not* offered a useful kind of rehearsal for other, more formal forms of political engagement.

Beyond this notion of a rehearsal for other forms of political engagement, the complexity and overwhelming nature of the piece may also have had an effect on the conversations which occurred within the space. The unique nature of the conversations which took place within *We Know Not* was a significant achievement

for this piece, and for many audiences, it was the highlight of the experience. I shall now turn my attention to this, linking again to Victor Turner's understanding of liminality and how these conversations may contribute to creating a useful democratic space.

7.3 Communitas and conversations with strangers

An important element of Victor Turner's concept of liminality is its collective nature. He used the term 'communitas', defined as an intensely interconnected and egalitarian way of being with others, who are also involved in the liminal experience (1969). J Lowell Lewis (2008) argues that the concept of communitas is one of Turner's least-developed and most problematic theories. He aims to unpick and develop Turner's notion of communitas through linking it with phenomenological accounts of 'intersubjectivity' and 'intercorporeality' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962), which arise through "common corporeal experience such as shared touch, shared smell, shared hearing, shared sound making and the like" (Lewis, 2008, p. 53). These collective experiences can enable a strong sense of connection within a group: as the corporeal experience becomes one experienced and understood collectively, rather than individually.

The concept of communitas (as understood with relation to intercorporeality) is particularly interesting within the framing of theatre in which a collective gather for a communal, often emotional, experience. As explored in the chapter 5 in relation to *Cathy*, theatre can create a collective emotional experience, and many theorists and theatre makers describe 'the audience' as a singular entity (Artaud, [1964] 2017; Brook, [1968] 2008). Indeed, emergent psychology research has shown that audience members' hearts begin to beat in unison whilst watching performances (Devlin, Richardson, Hogan, & Nuttal, 2017). This link between the collective experience of theatre and Merleau-Ponty's intercorporeality has been made elsewhere within the discipline of performance studies (Garner, 1994; Preece, 2013; Szynkarczuk, 2015). However, the majority of these accounts have been for more traditional theatre or dance performances which take place upon a stage, with an audience as a group of spectators.

In *We Know Not,* there was no stage and the audience became an integral part of the content of the piece. The main action of the piece required audiences to become

factory worker in the Factory of the Future, and to fulfil their role within this fiction by engaging in policy discussions with other factory workers around them. From my observations and interviews I would argue that being cast as a part of a collective, and the reinforcement of this casting through design and performance techniques, contributed to the surprisingly in-depth political conversations which occurred between strangers in a short time-span within the space. Almost every person I interviewed for this research (in exit interviews and in-depth interviews in the months following the performance) spoke at length of their conversations with strangers. For many, this was the most exciting element of the piece. A great deal of care and attention went into the design for how to provoke and maintain in-depth conversations between strangers. All of the workshops I attended in the months leading up to the event were testing how this part of the installation would work. Through workshops and rehearsal METIS explored in detail what stimulated the best conversations and experimented with fostering a sense of collectivity amongst the audience, as well as developing the clarity of the wording and the framing of each policy card. This was the first activity the audience were invited to do once they had entered the Factory of the Future (after the talk in the scene dock), and audiences generally responded very positively to the novelty of being invited to discuss these ideas with strangers. For example,

> *I have these kinds of chats in the pub with mates – but this was totally different. Talking to strangers, from a different world, it was like having 'a blank canvas' to talk to strangers. It created a different kind of place to explore ideas*. (Exit interview, 050918)

> *Interesting to talk to strangers: how they thought about these topics. It was really out of the norm of who you speak to about these topics…* (Exit interview, 080918)

> And,

> *I ended up going around the installation with a couple I met – it was nice to work it all out with others – that felt empowering.* (Exit interview, 080918)

There was particular enthusiasm for the opportunity to hear from differing perspectives. Disagreement and debate was welcomed and encouraged in the space,

and was clearly enjoyed by audience members. These disagreements did not diminish a sense of collectivity or undermine the shared goal of the factory workers to build an ideal future society. My data suggests that those who had lively disagreements with other audience members in the space often responded most positively to the piece as a whole. For example, one audience member commented on the range of ages in the space: *"Conversations were great, and the intergenerational aspect felt important. There were a lot of different perspectives to the discussion, which felt useful"* (Exit interview, 060918).

Whilst others spoke more generally of disagreements:

> [Audience member smiled to themselves when I asked 'what kinds of conversations did you have'] *I had heated conversations with strangers – it was constructive debate, and I was persuaded to think in a different way.* (Exit interview 080918).
>
> *I disagreed with people on my table, but could definitely understand where they were coming from.* (Exit interview, 080918)

And,

> *I had some disagreements, I was actually persuaded by a young woman to change my mind on a vote!* (Exit interview, 060918)

Another spoke of the usefulness of hearing from those with from different backgrounds:

> *It was great to speak with strangers who come from different perspectives, for example, from China. We had a conversation about whether we should trust the state with our data, and had a difference of opinion, which came from an international approach!"* (DdM25102018)

This feedback counterbalances the limitations to inclusivity mentioned above. The need for inclusivity in democratic spaces is due to the need for a diversity of perspectives; a need for the "wisdom of the expression and criticism of the diverse options of all the members of the society" (Young, 2000, p. 6). These reflections from audience members demonstrate that there was a diversity of opinion and perspective in the space: across ages, nationalities and political opinion. Furthermore, audiences commented on their excitement at being afforded this

opportunity to have political conversations with strangers with whom you would not normally have this kind of conversation. For example,

> *Politics needs to be more cohesive and more present throughout our society – you know? I think we need to be more united. And its things like this which unite us – you know – speaking to strangers, in spaces like this.* (Exit interview, 060918)

> *Conversations like this don't usually happen, like extend out to climate change, or how we create a holistic system.* (Exit interview 060918)

> And,

> *I had an interesting conversation with a complete stranger about whether we should have tariffs or not. I would never do that normally!* (AC081018)

Whilst disagreement was common within the space, the collaborative and supportive nature of the conversations was also commented upon, as well as the quality of listening in the space:

> *But when people had a very different opinion, they thought, oh maybe I should listen. Even if I don't agree. Which is interesting, because you would think it would be the other way around (as in, they would listen when they already agreed). But actually, I think people were more inclined to listen when, yeah, when someone had a difference of opinion. Or were able to have a different perspective on something that they were certain of, like: 'no this is how it is.' And someone else has a different experience. I think that's because you're confronted with that person face-to-face. Whereas often those conversations happen online, in spaces where you're more anonymous. Whereas, when actually someone is in front of you it's hard not to listen.* (EB260918)

> And,

> *As a space, it felt collaborative rather than competitive in terms of building the future.*
> (Exit interview, 060918)

That the space seemed to encourage listening, particularly through disagreement, is significant in terms of creating a useful democratic space. Listening is a crucial,

and often overlooked, component of useful democratic spaces: "in order to have a large number of values in common, all the members of the group must have an equitable opportunity to receive and take from others" (Dewey, [1916] 1999, p. 84).

However, there was also a report from the audience member quoted above that in one discussion they were spoken over and mostly ignored:

> *I was sat at a table with two women older than me and I felt really uncomfortable. I couldn't get a word in. I literally said nothing. They just spoke directly over me, and I don't know if they found it awkward, but I found it so awkward – I mean I was sitting in between them and they just didn't let me speak.* (Exit interview, 050918)

In my follow up interview, I reminded the interviewee of this experience, to which they replied that the women at her table had been "*very passionate*", and "*it just showed how necessarily these conversation are"*. From my participant observation and interviews, it seemed that there was generally a good standard of listening within the space. However, this was not always the case. This was due, in part, to the limited facilitation at each of the tables: meaning the conversations were at times dominated by one or two individuals. However, from my observations and interviews this seemed to be much less common than I had predicted it would be.

Taken together, these audience responses demonstrate that *We Know Not* created a space in which meaningful, two-way exchanges were welcome and encouraged (with a few notable exceptions). It was also possible to disagree with strangers about political issues – political issues we do not even necessarily speak to our families and friends about. What made this space allow for these types of conversations, and so different to '*chats with mates down at the pub'* (Exit interview, 070918)?

I want to offer two interpretations of how these collaborative and productive conversations between strangers were fostered within *We Know Not.* The first is related to an intercorporeal experience of communitas. Arguably, the liminal quality of the space, created through the design and performance techniques discussed in the previous section, coupled with the conscious casting of the audience as a collective (a generation of factory workers), with an explicit common task (building a better future), created a kind of communitas between audience

members. This sense of liminality and communitas created the right conditions for productive, political conversations. Being *"taken away from routine*" (Exit interview, 060918) invited the audience to relate to one another in a way they may not do so in ordinary situations. Those around you in this strange space become co-conspirators in this fictional world, where things which are improbable in reality become possible. There is an immediate connection with strangers in the fact that the audience are cast together in the same role, as factory workers, which is reinforced again with also being a part of the same 'generation'. From this space of otherworldliness and collectivity, audience members entered into in-depth political discussions and lively disagreements with strangers and friends alike.

However, unlike the experiences drawn on by both Turner (1969) and Merleau-Ponty (1962), the world of *We Know Not* is one based on verbal exchange, rather than one of physical embodiment. As the quotes above demonstrate, there is a sense of sharing the experience with strangers, a readiness to exchange ideas and an openness to listen to alternative perspectives. However, it does not facilitate the kind of collective religious experience explored by Turner in relation to rituals (1967; 1982). The experience of exchange with others in *We Know Not* is about the exchange of ideas through language, rather than a physical or even particularly emotional experience. Indeed, unlike many theatre experiences, *We Know Not* mostly lacked a traditional emotional engagement with its audiences. There were no protagonists or story, rather there were policy suggestions for discussion, and there were bureaucratic voting processes and 3D modelling. The emotional reactions from audiences were predominately either in response to the ideas contained within the piece (e.g. how one may feel about a universal basic income), or in response to the experience of the installation as a whole (e.g. feeling overwhelmed by *We Know Not* when they first entered the space). Overall, the content of the exchanges with fellow audience members in this piece were more akin to those you may have in other, more traditional, democratic spaces.

Therefore, it is useful to investigate the second potential explanation for the quality of conversations that occurred within the space: that it is unrelated to its artistic qualities. Arguably, the invitation to have these conversations, accompanied with useful and clearly- worded prompts for these discussions was enough to provoke meaningful discourse. There are many examples (some of which are offered in

chapter 2 of this thesis) of traditional democratic spaces which have successfully facilitated the conditions for meaningful conversations, listening and disagreement between strangers. It would appear that this has been achieved without artistic design and performance technique(s) creating a sense of liminality and communitas. Therefore, it is possible that the quality of the conversations which occurred within *We Know Not* were related to the installation's similarities to a more traditional democratic space (e.g. a citizens assembly), rather than its artistic and liminal qualities.

Without further research and a direct comparative analysis between traditional democratic spaces and participatory theatre events like *We Know Not,* it is difficult to conclusively argue for either explanation. In light of this, I would argue that the although the theatrical nature of the piece did assist in the development of a sense of intercorporeal communitas amongst audience members, it is likely that this was not the only factor in creating suitable conditions for productive and meaningful political conversations between strangers. These theatrical elements may have had significance for some audience members, yet there were likely others who would have just as easily launched into political discourse with strangers within traditional democratic spaces.

7.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, *We Know Not* by METIS presents a unique case study in exploring participatory theatre as a useful democratic space: unlike *Cathy, We Know Not* was experimenting with a new approach to participatory theatre making. The aims of the company in creating this piece were closely related to the elements of a democratic space, particularly in terms of creating a space to imagine alternative futures and to encourage political conversations between strangers. Although the company never used this terminology, and did not set out to create a democratic space. Indeed, in my initial conversation with artistic director Zoe Svensden, she expressed surprise that I would be interested in the project, as she did not see the space as 'democratic'. Her perception was related to the fact that the space had a lot of rules and that the audience were not given much freedom within the installation. However, as an audience member commented in my interviews – *"…you have to be given a set of rules and told how to behave in order to be*

democratic" (CS251018). The typology of a democratic space laid out in chapter 2 is prescribed in terms of how to behave in the space (in terms of listening) and the focus/aims of the space (in terms of the common good and political efficacy). This is, in turn, very similar to the prescribed nature of *We Know Not*: how the audience behaves in the space is prescribed (they are factory workers, there to perform specific tasks), as is the focus of the space (to address the policy proposals in the space, predominately related to issues of social and environmental justice). Overall, *We Know Not* made a useful case study for this research in terms of its application to the concept of democratic space, as well as its distinctive approach to participatory theatre (particularly in contrast to the well-established technique of TO discussed in relation to *Cathy*).

In examining the data collected from fieldwork and interviews through the lens of liminality, I was able to draw out some potential explanations for how this piece did (and did not) create a useful democratic space, which I will summarise now.

The piece presented an interesting contradiction in terms of **inclusivity**: it provided a space which seemed to facilitate and encourage differing perspectives and disagreement, yet was also alienating for some audience members. The overwhelming nature of the space (itself a key factor in creating its liminality) meant that, for some audiences, the piece was inaccessible. For them, it was felt that the space was too confusing and that there was a lack of care and facilitation in the space to help them understand and engage with the piece. This limits the use of *We Know Not* as a democratic space. However, those who did get past the confusing and complex nature of the installation (which was the majority of audience members), were then able to have conversations with strangers and found great enjoyment in hearing differing perspectives and engaging in debate with others. In this way, the space could be said to be inclusive of a range of perspectives and opinions, which were welcomed and shared during the piece.

However, another limitation to the inclusivity of this space was its positionality within the Barbican Arts Centre, which raised both cultural and cost barriers to engagement. As addressed in chapter 4, METIS and Artsadmin (who produced the show) did make efforts to invite 'young people' and 'disadvantaged groups & individuals' (terminology taken from company's internal reporting). They also

provided free tickets for anyone who engaged with the workshops and test performances, who were primarily drawn from partner theatres' outreach and engagement groups. According to their reporting 7% of the audience were young people or from disadvantaged groups, and 15% were offered free tickets based on their past engagement with the project. There are no Audience Agency statistics (or any other reporting) available for the remaining 77% of the audience for *We Know Not*, but sector wide reporting suggests that theatre spaces like the Barbican Arts Centre continue to see under-representation from those from Black and Asian backgrounds, and those with disabilities, as well as over-representation from those from 'higher social classes' (as defined by income and educational attainment) (Naylor, Lewis, Branzanti, Devlin, & Dix, 2016, p. 52). The significant issues this poses for the potential of participatory theatre as a useful democratic space is returned to in chapters 8 and 9.

The quality of **listening** within the space was generally described as positive, and the extent to which audiences seemed to enjoy their conversations and debates with fellow audience members suggests these were constructive experiences. There were exceptions to this, for example, when more *"dominant characters"* (EB260918) took over the conversation – due (in part) to a lack of facilitation.

A sense of collectivity is an important aspect of the **discourse on the common good**. The piece imbued a strong sense of collectivity through both the design and performance elements of the piece. For example, the low and focussed lighting around tables bringing the focus to the strangers sat around a table with you, or in casting the audience as a generation of factory workers, all with matching costumes and purpose in the space. It was clear from interviews and observation that there was a strong sense of everyone working together for a common goal, namely, building a better future. "*Felt like we were all part of something together*" (Exit interview 080918). Furthermore, this was not limited to thinking in terms of one generation: the structure of the piece very deliberately encouraged audiences to think in the long term. By offering audiences a generation number; by surrounding them with the input and ideas of past audience generations; and by ensuring they depended on future generations for votes, METIS created the sense of being a part of a much larger collective which extended beyond one generation. Overall, *We Know Not* was a space in which audiences enjoyed the unusual opportunity to focus

in on big political issues and ideas, with an explicit aim of building a better future. METIS also worked hard to ensure that audience had a sense of working amongst others in this endeavour, as part of a collective, both within their own generation, but also across time.

In many ways, *We Know Not* was similar to other, more traditional democratic spaces. Like a citizens' assembly, a group of strangers came together to discuss policy ideas aimed at improving society for all. However, it was not designed as a democratic space, and was explicitly created and presented as a piece of art. It was performed in a theatre and made by a theatre company, with close attention paid to design and performance. It is this approach, and its positionality as a fictional space, which gave it a sense of liminality. This contributed to its potential role as a democratic space by fostering **imagination and a belief in alternatives**. The audience entered a fictional space in which creating a different world was tangible: as they moved through the installation, the audience could see laws passed, could vote them through themselves and play with how these decisions had an impact in the 2040s. This world was created with great skill and attention to detail in terms of how the audience interacted with the space, the sound and visual journey of the piece. Creating this fictional world also offered a sense of playfulness, which supported the engagement from audiences in two ways: it encouraged them to engage in the first place, as a kind of 'seduction' (Jackson, 2009), and secondly, it allowed the audience to delve into difficult topics through a spirit of play and humour.

There was no engagement with formal politics in the development or performance of *We Know Not.* Unlike *Cathy,* this piece had no specific campaign or ambitions toward altering policy and, in terms of its political efficacy, it lacked any formal policy impact. Although, it is important to note that in the months after *We Know Not,* Zoe Svensden did host a series of workshops with policy-makers – primarily from lobbying groups, think tanks and local government. These workshops utilised the contributions of the audience or 'factory workers' from the Barbican performances of *We Know Not.* They were predominately focused on how we have political conversations about environmental issues, rather than aimed at altering policy. The failure of participatory theatre to influence policy or meaningfully engage with formal politics will be returned to again in chapters 8 and 9.

However, as outlined in previous chapters, policy impact is only one element of political efficacy. In this thesis I am also interested in exploring how democratic spaces may contribute to political literacy (in terms of public opinion/understanding of key issues), and political confidence (influence on participants self-perception as political actors – e.g. activists or citizens). Similarly to *Cathy, We Know Not* offered an opportunity for a *"useful kind of rehearsal for future political situations"* (Exit Interview 090918). Many in the audience commented on how playing with these alternatives felt empowering for them beyond the space. I would argue that, for these audience members, this experience contributed to their political confidence:

> *…having a space where you can make decisions and you see those decisions put into action and have consequences – I think it's a really good way of then being able to put that into your own life. Even if it is really small-scale – like having the ability to make that change.* (EB260918)

> *I'm just thinking of it like – like we've discussed before in terms of community decision making – and involving people in democracy in a way that maybe conventional democracy doesn't do.* (JMMCT161018)

> [In this piece they were] *literally giving people the ability to say, in this world – in the confines of this space – giving people the agency to make decisions and saying, your opinions do matter. Often people think, 'oh I am too stupid or I don't have – I don't know – x degree in whatever you need to understand these things. But even despite that, people know a lot more than they think. I think, yeah, we wanted to try and give the audience a sense of that. We did have a lot of people who were educated come in and they gave their own contributions – fine – but also as well, like, we had young people come in as well. And honestly even if you don't understand you know, like, all of what is going on, your ideas are still forced to matter. When you're thinking about it from the perspective of 'what would be best for everybody' as well. That does make a difference.* (RA260918)

Furthermore, the piece was highly informative in terms of presenting key political and social issues and potential solutions to them, both from the content offered by METIS, and from conversations with other audience members. Many in the

audience commented on how they came across information they had not previously encountered and welcomed the opportunity to learn more about these issues. Indeed, many had follow-on conversations after the piece with family and friends about the issues raised in the piece:

> *Being on the tables with others was great! We had good conversations about things I have never really thought about. We talked about data, which I knew nothing about, but I was ok with that.* (Exit Interview, 030518)

> *And what I really appreciated about this piece was that there was… a huge amount of thinking and research had gone into it. So you were actually encountering real information and it wasn't that 'express yourself on a wall'.* (CS171018)

Therefore, there is evidence that the piece did offer some kind of political efficacy in terms of political literacy on some key issues.

The liminal quality of the space created an environment conducive to political conversations with strangers, it nurtured a sense of communitas and a focus on the common good, and encouraged imagination. The piece had some forms of political efficacy, although was limited in other ways. Overall, *We Know Not* did offer distinctive and useful opportunities in terms creating democratic spaces. However, as I shall now address in chapters 8 and 9, limitations related to inclusivity and political efficacy significantly undermine the overall potential of participatory theatre as a democratic space.

Chapter 8: A summary of key findings

In this chapter I will be revisiting and elaborating on the key findings from my two case studies. In so doing, I aim to refocus on the research questions which have framed this research:

Primary

- Can participatory theatre create a useful democratic space?

Secondary

- Is there anything distinctive about participatory theatre as an approach to creating democratic spaces?

- What are the limitations to this approach to democratic spaces?

In this chapter I will be focussing on what my two case studies can tell us about participatory theatre productions as democratic spaces, as well as highlighting the key opportunities and limitations to this approach which have arisen from this research. Overall, the data gathered from my fieldwork suggests that, although these projects offer valuable and distinctive approaches to creating and facilitating democratic spaces, they ultimately cannot be understood as useful democratic spaces due to limitations of inclusivity and political efficacy.

This thesis sits at the nexus of two interdisciplinary fields of inquiry: 1) the study of the social role of the arts, primarily from the disciplines of Theatre Studies, Cultural Policy, Media & Communications and industry publications, and 2) investigations into democratic engagement, from the disciplines of Politics and Political Theory. This thesis seeks to make an original contribution to these fields by applying theories drawn from both to two in-depth case studies. By offering an empirical investigation into participatory theatre as a distinctive approach to democratic spaces, this research contributes insights into how we create inclusive, imaginative and useful democratic spaces, and the limitations and opportunities for the civic role of participatory theatre.

I will begin this chapter by refocussing my attention on the role of emotion and

mood in participatory theatre, and its implications for creating democratic spaces. Then, I will explore the ways in which traditional structures of expertise were both reinforced and subverted within both *Cathy* and *We Know Not.* The position of both of these case studies as theatre, and therefore artistic experiences, has been significant to my findings in this project. In the subsequent two sections of this chapter I will focus directly on these case studies as artistic experiences: exploring the liminality and playfulness which arises from the artistic nature of this work. I will conclude this chapter by exploring two key limitations of participatory theatre as democratic space which have arisen from this research, namely political efficacy and inclusivity, which fundamentally undermine the extent to which participatory theatre can create useful democratic spaces.

8.1 Emotion and mood

A key aspect of the majority of theatre, and other artforms, is its ability to evoke an emotional response from its audiences. This is closely linked with our personal and collective experience of the piece. As Hesmondhalgh argues with specific reference to music: "its relationships to affective experience, to emotion and feeling, are distinctive and are important for music's ability to contribute to human flourishing" (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p. 5). The aspect most widely commented upon in my interviews with audiences regarding *Cathy* was the emotional impact of the experience, even when, for some, it had been over a year since seeing the piece.

The lasting quality of *Cathy* was significant and closely linked to its emotional nature – it was an experience which stayed with its audiences for months (and even years) after seeing the production. In chapter 5 of this thesis, I offer evidence to suggest that this lasting quality presents an opportunity in terms of the political efficacy of *Cathy.* The emotional nature of the performance had a long-term impact and informed subsequent conversations audiences had with others about homelessness, their understanding and engagement with related issues, and in their attitudes towards homeless individuals.

The emotive nature of art is closely linked with its political potential, which, as touched upon in both chapter 3 and 5, has been historically problematic. For Plato, it is only through reason that we can reach truth and justice (Plato, [375 BC] 2003), and because art played on our emotions, it should be kept away from political

discourse as emotions clouded our rational capacities. This hierarchical dualism of rationality over emotions within political discourse still prevails today within the literature concerning deliberative democracy and democratic theory more generally (Bohman & Rehg, 1997; Dryzek & Pickering, 2017; Rawls, [1971] 1999). As explored in chapter 5, *Cathy,* by Cardboard Citizens, unashamedly provokes its audiences' emotions. A key aspect of Forum and Legislative Theatre is that the audience is motivated to intervene in the protagonist's plight, therefore, the audience must feel something for the protagonist (Jackson, 2009).

I would argue the emotional manipulation present within *Cathy* is different from the deceptive vision of art presented by Plato, and crucially different from the populist and racist aims of the Nazi Party's propaganda. The use of emotion in *Cathy* is explicitly for pluralist goals: the emotional nature of the story serves as a motivation for conversation. A key finding of this research (explored in chapter 5) is that the encouragement of emotional expression within *Cathy* allowed for views and policy ideas regarding homelessness to be shared amongst strangers with differing opinions, albeit within the same broad political starting point (i.e. that homelessness is bad and that there is a role for the state in addressing the social issues which contribute to the problem). The nature of the game, the emotional intensity of the story and then the playful atmosphere created by a skilled Joker, motivates engagement and allows for failure and disagreement in a way that is comfortable for the audience. In the many interventions I witnessed during my fieldwork with *Cathy,* there were rarely interventions with which the audience was completely satisfied. This is an important aspect of Forum and Legislative Theatre as this dissatisfaction provokes continued interventions and discussion. This disagreement is also crucial to creating a pluralistic space.

However, it is important to note that there were limitations to this, not least as there is an undoubtedly left-wing[65] bias within the premise of Legislative Theatre, and within the story of *Cathy.* As mentioned in chapter 5, there were some performances

[65] As in earlier chapters, the use of 'left-wing' here refers to a broadly socialist and social democrat opinions and assumptions within the origins of TO, as well as amongst the company (Cardboard Citizens), many of their audiences and the subject matter explored.

in which certain views[66] were unwelcome in the space. The audiences' compassion and emotional relationship with the protagonists in *Cathy* are well developed, and this serves as a motivation for a productive and in-depth discourse around homelessness. However, it can also create a defensive atmosphere in which criticisms of the protagonists themselves are unwelcome. Overall, the emotional nature of *Cathy* can both contribute and detract from the inclusivity and quality of listening and exchange within the space. This is highly dependent on the Joker who is facilitating the conversation, as it is often according to their discretion as to which suggestions and views are given time and attention. It is not a coincidence that the performance at which one interviewee spoke of the dismissal of an opposing 'Tory' view was a performance which lacked a Joker (one of the actors had taken on this role).

The emotional nature of *Cathy* also contributed to a sense of collectivity amongst the audience. The audience's emotional experience of *Cathy* was a shared one, and this was a strong theme within the fieldwork; whether this was in relation to a shared sense of incredulity as a collective gasp and hushed exclamations are heard rippling through the audience, or whether this was an explicit comment from an interviewee: "*... when you hear other people either suggesting changes you want to see, or you've already thought about yourself and go 'great other people are thinking about this as well'!"* (JP200718)[67]. This shared mood in *Cathy* is a crucial aspect of the experience of a live theatre piece. As explored in detail in chapter 5, there is a collective feeling of purpose towards improving life for Cathy and those who face homelessness more generally. This mood is important to the democratic space because it offers a crucial sense of a common goal, which is – in turn – crucial to the discourse on the common good.

However, this sense of a collective mood can also compound the issue of the exclusion of certain views outlined above. Those who seem to disagree with the broad goal of the collective can be unwelcome in the discourse, which makes for

[66] One interviewee recalled being at a performance of *Cathy* at the Edinburgh Fringe in which the audience "*collectively got really angry at"* another audience member, described as "*like a fatalistic Tory- blaming individuals"*. It is important to note that this intervention was quickly brushed over – in part due to the necessity for a very abridged Forum at the Edinburgh Fringe performances.

[67] Knowing that others have assessed the situation in the same way as you is gratifying, and can give rise to a feeling of collectivity, solidarity, and/or the amelioration of loneliness.

an exclusionary space, only available for those who hold the same broadly similar perspective.

This sense of a collective mood, with its benefits and drawbacks, was also apparent in *We Know Not.* The mood of the piece was developed through a variety of design and performance techniques, from casting the audience themselves as a collective 'generation' of factory workers, to creating low and focussed lighting around tables to draw the audience into intimate conversations. Like *Cathy,* in *We Know Not* there was a shared purpose for those taking part in the piece and this encouraged a sense of collectivity. However, unlike *Cathy, We Know Not* did not generate a shared mood through an emotional narrative. *We Know Not* almost entirely lacked characters and there was no push for compassion for a protagonist. This affected the lasting quality of the piece for audiences and I found that even when only two months had passed since seeing the piece, many audiences struggled to remember their experience clearly[68]. Overall, *We Know Not* generated a mood primarily through the design of the space: its sound, aesthetic and the tone of the audiences' interactions with performers, rather than through an emotional narrative. I will explore mood generation and its importance in creating a useful democratic space below when referring to the liminal quality of the piece.

8.2 Approach and prioritisation of different types of expertise

To varying degrees *Cathy* and *We Know Not* emphasise the expertise of the audience within their performances. The structure of participatory theatre requires that the audience take part in the action of the piece. Both case studies provided an opportunity for the audience to offer their knowledge and ideas to the performance. In *Cathy,* this is a key underpinning of the genre of Theatre of the Oppressed and has both symbolic and practical value. In *We Know Not,* the way in which knowledge and ideas were exchanged was intimate – between a few other people, rather than the audience as a whole. The subversions of expertise within both pieces have value in terms of creating a useful democratic space, particularly in terms of inclusivity and listening.

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[68] There is an established field of study within psychology and neuroscience linking memory and emotions (Rapaport, 1942; Tyng, Amin, Saad, & Malik, 2017). It is beyond the scope of this thesis to delve into this discussion, however, it is broadly accepted that there is a positive correlation between strong emotional responses and memory.

Cathy was an example of both Forum and Legislative Theatre, both techniques within the Theatre of the Oppressed 'arsenal' (Boal, 1979, 1998). Within this genre there is a strong emphasis on opening up the space to the expertise of the audience. The theatrical technique mirrors Freire's pedagogical philosophy: that learning and teaching should be an egalitarian exchange, rather than a 'banking' mechanism, whereby a teacher (or in this instance, a theatre company) 'deposits' information on a passive learner. Forum and Legislative Theatre technique recognises the expertise present within the audience by inviting them onto the stage, as well as by inviting reflections and critiques of these interventions from the rest of the audience. The aim is to create a space of exchange between audience members and between the audience and the actors, in which all take on the roles of teacher and learner simultaneously. This is symbolically powerful. Boal believed that this symbolic power within the theatre space could also have important real-world implications:

> [You are] dynamised when you go on stage. Because by doing so what you do is a transgression… And then it works symbolically to tell the spectator, "I am able to do this here". The phrase I-am-able-to-do-this-here includes I-am-able-to-do-this. (as quoted by Morelos, 1999)

From my empirical research, there is evidence to suggest that this symbolic gesture did offer a broader sense of what was politically and socially possible and a sense of empowerment for many audience members. For example,

> *I still feel even now like it was a great piece of theatre and yeah and I walked away with that sense of empowerment I guess and I've still got that sense of empowerment and will probably still have it in the months to come*. (CA300518)

And,

> *I think when I saw it the first time I felt absolutely gutted after the first half of the play but then I felt invigorated when we had the opportunity to take part in the forum.* (AM110418)

Neither of these audience members performed an intervention, although both were involved in the discussions. Therefore, the symbolic act of inviting audiences to

become spect-actors (and thereby equalising the sense of who holds knowledge in the space) did offer a sense of empowerment and broaden a sense of possibility, even for those who did not take to the stage. The invitation to take Cathy's place within the story, and to change the situation, was an invitation for the audience to reflect on social and political alternatives – and this reflection was very present within my interviews, whether they had intervened or not. As Rt. Hon. John Healey (MP) commented: *"…the forum focuses people's minds on the fact that things don't need to be like this. And also helps people think about changes they want to see"* (interviewed 05.03.2018).

Within the *Cathy* performances there was clear evidence of the subversion of traditional hierarchies of expertise, and a number of skilled Jokers were generally able to facilitate a space in which the majority of audience members felt able to speak[69]. Each spect-actor who took to the stage, regardless of age, gender, race, educational attainment or social status, was given the attention of the whole audience. Some interventions were based on personal experiences related to the story, others were emotional responses to the piece, and others were more focussed on technical policy. Each intervention was generally followed by clarifications (e.g. the Joker asking the rest of audience what occurred in this intervention to ensure it is properly understood), followed by questions and discussion specific to their intervention. This bears a close resemblance to Dobson's description of ideal listening for democracy (2014), in which "the listener then processes what has been heard, making sense of it in her own terms, perhaps through… asking questions for clarification – all this before making her own intervention" (p. 68). The Joker's role is first to create a space for the spect-actors' intervention, and then to ensure there is clarity amongst the audience, so that all the audience understands the intervention, prior to critiques and discussion of its success.

However, there were also some practical limitations to the ideals of Boal and Freire touched upon above. Some audiences felt unable to share due to the performative

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[69] For example, in one *Cathy* performance, for council/local authority workers in Hackney: "*At one point a young apprentice says "oh I've just started, so I might be wrong…" Tony [the Joker] is careful to pick up on this and reinforce that their opinions and perspectives are very valid and important – which gets a round of applause from the audience."* (Field notes, Priority Needs workshop, 28.02.2018).

nature of the invitation, as well as a sense that to intervene was to blame Cathy for her decisions: *"I wasn't comfortable with, kinda, standing up in front of people, like 'I've got this alternative which is better' because I really didn't think there was one"* (MCTJM130618). Therefore, whilst the expressive and performative nature of the discourse empowered some audiences, it was alienating for others.

In contrast, the invitation for audience engagement in *We Know Not* was much less performative and allowed for more focused exchange within small groups. Indeed, the same audience member quoted above also attended *We Know Not:*

> *...you kind of had to be involved, really, in this one. 'Cause if you're not – then what else are you going to do? Just sit there reading… I feel like, if you're a bit more introverted or something, you wouldn't get up in Cathy – but this was a much easier way to get involved without pressure.* (MCTJM161018)

This audience member recalls feeling like they had to engage due to the intimate nature of the piece: it would be difficult to not engage in a conversation given that it is just you and a few other people sat together on a small table. Yet, although there was more of an imperative to engage, this engagement felt relatively easy, as it was just a small group, or even just one other person. This setting, in contrast to Forum Theatre and many traditional democratic spaces, allows the participant to voice views and ask questions without the pressure of speaking in front of others. Audience members from *We Know Not* remarked on not having fully formed opinions or ideas on the subjects, but '*working through ideas'* and '*figuring it out'* as a small group (Exit interviews, 0918). In this way, the piece emphasised the ideas, opinions and conversations, which occurred between everyone in the space. *"*[in the Factory of the Future] *your opinions do matter… I think yeah, we wanted to try and give the audience a sense of that… your ideas are still forced to matter"* (RA260918). Unlike in *Cathy,* engaging was not really a choice and, aside from a small number of audience members who left early, everyone engaged with and added their views to the piece.

We Know Not begins with a very traditional notion of expertise: a "short talk from a visionary speaker" (Barbican Arts Centre, 2018). This was also reinforced by the policy cards in the space. The artists who made the piece spent years researching

policy ideas for future building and developed the ideas with experts in the field, and it was this research that informed the content and wording of the policy cards. Many of the 'visionary speakers' were recruited from this research and Zoe Svensden's 'research in public' events, in which she held conversations with these experts in front of a live audience. This was a key part of the development of *We Know Not.* Therefore, although the piece asked for the knowledge and views of everyone in the audience, this invitation was framed carefully around predetermined policy ideas developed from a traditional notion of expertise[70].

Arguably, this framing allowed deeper and more detailed conversations to occur more quickly. In early development workshops conversations were left very open and policy suggestions were left almost entirely to audience members. However, the makers of *We Know Not* found that the resulting suggestions were often vague and difficult for subsequent generations to vote upon or discuss, due to a lack of detail. The specificity of the framings that were used in the final performance were purposefully built on the work of experts who have put great effort and time into the detail of policy recommendations. This allowed the conversations in the space, which were very time-limited, to get in-depth and detailed much more quickly. At times this was due to disagreement with the policy suggestions, which motivated fruitful discussions: *Lots and lots of conversations grew out of disagreement with the proposals on the cards!* (Exit interview 060918). This was a positive step in terms of creating a useful democratic space in which citizens were able to engage in discourse regarding the common good, and explore potential alternatives.

The time-restricted nature of both *We Know Not* and *Cathy* limited the complexity of the conversations. In more traditional democratic spaces, conversations and decision-making processes can often last many hours, or take place over a number of sessions. In both case studies, each collection of audience members will only come together once, and the discussion time in both was often limited to an hour or so. In *Cathy,* it was often considerably less than this, indeed, at the Edinburgh Fringe performances in 2017 the discussion of the forum was limited to only 15 minutes.

Despite these time restrictions, it is important to note that in many of the

[70] That is expertise gathered from academia, well-known publications or professional status.

performances for both case studies discussions became in-depth surprisingly quickly. Within *We Know Not,* a significant amount of detail was offered within the performance itself and in *Cathy* the audience was primed with a useful amount of information regarding housing policy and policy related to homelessness by the end of the performance. In both performances, this was often supplemented by those in the room with specific knowledge of the field in question (as mentioned above). Combined with the emotional motivation for discourse addressed earlier in this chapter (as well as in Chapter 5), conversations in the Forums of *Cathy* rarely took long to become in-depth and lively. I would argue that the liminality of the space, particularly in relation to *We Know Not* assisted in the speed by which audiences were able to enter into detailed political conversations with strangers. It is this quality I will now turn my attention to.

8.3 Liminality and imagining alternatives

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the introduction to *We Know Not* was highly sensory and often overwhelming for audiences[71]. The audiences' own bags were taken away and they were given the attire of the 'factory worker'. They were then led down a warren of corridors and into an industrial looking backstage room (the 'scene dock') in which they heard a short talk from a 'visionary speaker'. After this, the huge scene dock doors[72] creaked open and the Factory of the Future was revealed, with all its sounds, lighting and buzz of activity. This intense opening served an important role in the artistic process of inducting new audiences into the atmosphere of the space, and the liminal quality of the piece. It brought the audience out of reality and into a fictional realm, and, as I have argued in chapter 7 of this thesis, this sense of being within a fictional space opened up possibilities and allowed audiences to play with ideas outside of the confines of what is real or what seems possible.

So this idea that – I had a sense of it in the corridor, it was almost like we

[71] This was difficult to cope with for some audience members who found the overwhelming and confusing nature of *We Know Not* alienating and made it difficult for them to engage with the piece.
[72] These are the doors at the back of the stage, used to bring large scenery onto the stage. The scene dock area is a large workshop area, often used to build set pieces. In The Pit Theatre of the Barbican Arts Centre these doors are opened with a large, manually operated wheel, which slowly and dramatically pulls the doors along a rail.

> *imagined together that we imagined… this future world, even if you know you're only imagining it, it feels like a possibility.* (HJ27092018)

This sense of possibility and imagining the world differently is crucial to a useful democratic space. It challenges a neoliberal rationality, which denies alternative political systems. According to a neoliberal rationality, neoliberalism is not an ideology, but common sense: "what is called Thatcherism in this country is much older than Thatcher, it is *common sense* economics, and it works" (Thatcher, 1988, emphasis added). The sense of alternative possibilities within *We Know Not* directly challenges this notion through creating hundreds of alternatives and presenting them as almost immediately possible within the fictional world of the space. The piece creates a world in which any number of political, social and economic possibilities are achievable, and a world in which each citizen has a key role to play in creating this new future.

This closely relates to the power of symbolism within *Cathy* and Forum Theatre. In interventions the spect-actor takes on a fictional role – that of the protagonist of the piece. They then perform an alternative approach to the story that has just been presented to them. This gesture, like the role of the factory workers in *We Know Not,* invites the audience to physically embody the belief that alternatives are possible and explore these alternatives in a playful and imaginative way.

This sense of opening possibilities and imagination was a key theme present in both of my case studies, and something I would argue is present in most participatory theatre projects. Within this form, as participants within the piece, the audience enters the fictional space of the theatre piece. Within this fictional space, what is possible becomes a broad proposition. In terms of encouraging imagination and the possibility of alternatives, this is a powerful and distinctive starting point for a democratic space.

Another distinctive feature of participatory theatre practice, particularly in terms of its liminal quality, is its propensity to create a sense of collectivity within the space. In this research, it was clear that the process of entering a fictional space as a participant with a role to play, alongside other audience members in the same position had a bonding effect. This was apparent in both *We Know Not* and *Cathy.* *"Felt like we were all part of something together"* (Exit interview for *We Know*

Not, 080918). This assisted in the speed by which participants engaged in detailed and in-depth political discourse (mentioned above). Being outside of everyday reality invited the audience to relate to one another in a way they may not do so in ordinary situations. Those around you in this strange and highly atmospheric space become co- conspirators in this fictional world, where things which are improbable in reality become almost immediately possible. Within both performances, the audience had the ability to change the story and realities around them and to see and discuss the impacts of these decisions. In *Cathy,* the sense of collectivity was more strongly linked to the highly emotive mood of the narrative of the play, rather than necessarily being cast within the fictional and strange world of the piece. Whereas in *We Know Not,* it was the atmosphere of the space which predominately contributed to this sense of collectivity.

This touches upon one of the key ways in which these theatre pieces were different from one another. *Cathy* drew on real life narratives to push the emotional impact of the piece, and used the emotional nature of the piece to bring the audience together with a sense of a collective purpose – for example, improving conditions for Cathy and those in similar situations. Contrastingly, *We Know Not* created an entirely fictional and utopian world alongside its audiences and contained no narrative structure to guide the audience on an emotional journey. This reinforces my rationale for choosing these two distinctive case studies, as outlined in chapter 4. Whilst both are clear examples of participatory theatre, in which the audience plays an integral role in the action of the piece, and both are politically motivated and focussed on political discourse, they approach this undertaking in very different ways. This allows my research findings a broader applicability across participatory theatre practice.

Overall, the liminal quality of both of these theatre pieces is a key element in creating distinctive and useful democratic spaces. The invitation to the audience to enter a fictional world encourages imagination and a belief in alternatives in a direct and immediate way. In these case studies the realms of what is possible is much broader than within more traditional democratic spaces, as the audience sits outside of the limitations of reality. This liminal quality also builds a kind of collectivity between the audience members as they are all entering this ephemeral and fictional world together, cast within the same role. This is useful in terms of

creating a democratic space as it builds a sense of collectivity, which supports the discourse around a common good, and the quality of listening within the space.

8.4 Playful and disruptive approaches to political discourse

Another key feature of both case studies is the important role of disruption and playfulness. This has been a recurring theme throughout this thesis, however, it has not yet been directly addressed. This feature relates to the positionality of both *Cathy* and *We Know Not* as artistic events and has significance in terms of their potential as useful democratic spaces. Theatre is fundamentally a space of 'playing': the actors are playing characters, the world they have created is make-believe – it is a 'play'. In this way, even within tragedy there is a spirit of play. In participatory theatre, the audience is asked to take on an active and physical role within this playing. This playful spirit aims "…to disturb the established categories of truth and property, and, by so doing, open the road to possible new worlds" (Hyde, 2008, p. 13). As Freire (1970) and Boal (1979) (amongst others) acknowledge, for political change to occur it is crucial to acknowledge that political and social realities are not fixed. For both of them, disrupting what we understand to be fact and fiction, possible and impossible, is an important political act. As Wolfgang Iser (1993) argues, 'the opposition of fiction and reality is faulty – fictions always contain elements of reality and reality includes many fictional elements (e.g. narratives, beliefs and myths)' (p.2). Iser argues that fiction and play have a crucial social role in pushing the boundaries of reality and disrupting assumed norms. The act of playing is a political one particularly in both my case studies, which explicitly aim to use play to disrupt political realities, in order to create new ones.

There is a conceptual proximity between the Joker of Theatre of the Oppressed and the role of the Trickster, which appears in various guises across cultures and history: for example, The Coyote in Native American traditions, Loki in Norse mythology or Hermes in Greek mythology. The Joker belongs to no suit of cards – they are in-between the audience and the performers, a neutral yet disruptive entity. Similarly, "[the Tricksters] are the lords of the inbetween… the spirit of the doorway leading out, and of the crossroad at the edge of town (the one where the

little market springs up)[73]" (Hyde, 2008, p. 6). They invite the audience to challenge the fixed nature of the story and to disrupt the narrative to create new outcomes and journeys for the protagonists. In *Cathy,* the Jokers used humour as an invitation to intervene. This humour helped to break down social barriers of how we traditionally behave in a theatre space (i.e. we stay quietly in our seats and watch performers on the stage, we do not get up on stage). The humour and playfulness of the Joker enabled audience members to overcome the potential awkwardness and embarrassment of becoming a spect-actor.

In *We Know Not,* the design of the space took on a good deal of this facilitator role: the audience were given characters and how they interacted with the space mostly became clear from prompts within the design itself. The performers in the space fulfilled a playful and disruptive role, sometimes challenging the audience, often comically, and at other times offering them further information, yet always remaining in character as diligent factory workers. This is a popular technique within participatory theatre practice: having performers around and mingling with the audience. This technique assists the audience in committing to their own game of make-believe.

In both instances, the theatre pieces created a space of playfulness, in which the audience took on a character and entered into fictional worlds. From this space of play, the audience are able to test out ideas, experiment with alternative realities in an embodied way, through physically performing them. In this way both pieces invited the audience to disrupt current political realities through playful explorations of alternatives. Unlike other, more traditional, democratic spaces (e.g. participatory budgeting as described in chapter 2), within participatory theatre pieces there is less pressure to find a sensible and plausible proposal. There is the freedom to propose entirely impractical and fictitious ideas, and there is the freedom to fail. In these spaces the emphasis sits equally between play and political discourse. As referenced in chapter 5, an important aspect of performing the role of Joker in terms of facilitating interventions is asking yourself two questions: *"is this intervention useful? And, is the audience enjoying this intervention?"* (Field notes from Cardboard Citizens Joker Training, 05.2017). This typifies the spirit of

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[73] This links back to the liminal state mentioned in above – this state of being in between and remaking the world.

both case studies: alongside the key political questions of how we wish to live and how to make society a more just and sustainable place, there was also an emphasis on fun, enjoyment and playfulness. Indeed, these two aspects were not separate: the playful nature of the space created opportunities for the radical ideas and the imagination needed for useful democratic spaces.

8.5 Two limitations of participatory theatre as a useful democratic space

Despite the opportunities afforded by this distinctive approach in creating democratic spaces, throughout this thesis a number of limitations for participatory theatre as a useful democratic space have arisen. I will now highlight two key limitations which present the most significant barriers to participatory theatre's usefulness as a democratic space; the first is the lack of political credibility of theatre practice (particularly within formal political arenas), and the second is related to the barriers to engagement, and the potential homogeneity of its audiences resulting from these barriers. It is important to note that neither of these limitations are specific to my two case studies, but are industry-wide issues, applicable to many participatory theatre projects. Overall, despite the evidence outlined above for the significant opportunities in learning and re-thinking how to create and facilitate democratic spaces, these limitations mean that, fundamentally, neither of these case studies can be straightforwardly described as a useful democratic space.

The first limitation challenges the usefulness of play within participatory theatre spaces mentioned above. Often, within formal political settings, or even many traditional democratic spaces, when something is seen as playful or entertaining, it is also seen as something which cannot be taken seriously as a form of political discourse (Duncombe, 2007). Cardboard Citizens intended to create a piece of Legislative Theatre in creating *Cathy*, and, whilst there was great enthusiasm amongst audiences in proposing policy amendments and recommendations, these suggestions failed to have tangible impact upon policy[74]. It was performed in the House of Lords and at the Labour Party Conference in 2017, and although these

[74] It is important to note that Cardboard Citizens has had real success in policy impact through other projects: for example, the 'secret shopper' project they did with Shelter had direct impact upon the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017, and the *Priority Needs* workshops have assisted in local policy implementation.

performances had significant symbolic power and played a role in raising awareness and reinforcing pre-existing policy commitments, they did not include the forum or any discursive element. In these formal political settings, *Cathy* was not seen as an opportunity to facilitate discussion and debate through Forum Theatre, but to reinforce a point already agreed upon. It was clear from my conversations with policy-makers involved in *Cathy,* as well as public tweets and blogs from other politicians, that they saw tremendous value in *Cathy* as a piece to raise awareness about homelessness and to encourage reflection on the issue amongst audiences. However, they did not see it as *in itself* a space for policy-making and political discourse. Indeed, the discursive forum element of the piece was often overlooked in these conversations. In one interview with an MP who was a great advocate for the show, it was explicitly stated that the piece would have the same impact with or without the forum element.

This relates back to arguments put forward in chapter 6 of this thesis by Iwan Brioc, a Theatre of the Oppressed practitioner based in Wales. Iwan spoke of a Legislative Theatre project he led in Cardiff as part of the opening of the Senedd in 2002, in which the AMs and civil servants of the Assembly did not see the project not as an exercise in lobbying, or a valid form of political discourse. It was generally viewed as a community theatre project, which was socially valuable, but had no real role to play in policy-making or formal politics. Almost no AMs attended any performances and none attended the forums, despite the performances taking place as part of a programmed series of events to celebrate the opening and occurring in a tent just outside the main building. For Iwan, this failure of direct engagement with formal politics was a failure of the project, which he felt was *"just symbolic"* and *"that symbolic forms of political theatre is absolutely meaningless. It has to be about real change"* (Iwan Brioc, 02.03.2018). By 'real change' Iwan means policy change, or action towards meaningful implementation of existing policies.

In *We Know Not,* the company sought no relationship with formal politics, and although activists were well represented amongst the audience and the speakers, there was no special effort to ensure there were elected representatives, lobbyists or policy-makers present. Unlike in the forums of *Cathy,* there was no implication that the political proposals or discourses within the performance space would have political impact beyond the space. For METIS, the political ambition of the piece

was very much focussed on the experience of its audiences and perhaps those who they went on to have conversations with as a result of the piece. Their ambition was never to build a relationship with formal policy-making, and this necessarily limits the project's potential political efficacy.

As stated in chapter 2 of this thesis, a democratic space depends on some kind of relationship with the state. This needn't be a relationship as close and defined as a citizen's assembly. Some democratic spaces explicitly choose to operate outside of formal politics to take on an oppositional, protest role – for example, Extinction Rebellion or Occupy. However, these groups still aim toward changing policy and a part of their measure of success is generally judged in these terms. In these terms, neither *Cathy* nor *We Know Not* had much success, and arguably, this was in no small part due to their positionality as theatre performances. The role of both *Cathy* and *We Know Not* as theatre undermines their potential to be taken seriously as democratic spaces, as they are seen as spaces of entertainment, fiction and play, rather than as spaces for meaningful political discourse. As stated in chapter 6, this does not devalue this work as an aesthetic experience, or overlook the other opportunities these case studies offer as sites of political discourse and action. However, a tangible and purposeful relationship with the state is a necessary element of democratic space and this limitation does raise questions for the suitability of this approach to creating democratic spaces.

The audiences who took part in these productions, as demonstrated in past chapters, engaged in meaningful political exchanges with strangers in which they were often challenged, found common ground and, occasionally even had their position changed. This result has political significance, particularly in terms of the broader discourse around deliberative democracy and the need to build a culture of deliberation rather than only one-off mini-publics in more traditional political spaces (Hammond, 2019; Niemeyer, 2019). Arguably, for these formal spaces to be successful a broad range of opportunities for citizens to come together to discuss the common good and imagine alternatives must also be available. This provides opportunities to 'activate the deliberative resources of citizens' (Niemeyer, 2019, p. 10), even if it does not explicitly and directly link to policy impact. Hammond (2019) argues that we need to generate a 'deliberative culture' and that even if arts spaces are not directly sites of policy-making, they are crucial to this effort. This

argument will be revisited and expanded upon in chapter 9.

The second major limitation to participatory theatre as a useful democratic space is its limited inclusivity and the broadly homogenous nature of its audiences. As addressed in earlier chapters of this thesis, both case studies lacked social diversity within their audiences. My empirical data (from participant observation, exit interviews, audience statistics and in-depth interviews) also suggests that audiences generally shared similar left-wing political views. The audience for both pieces were self-selecting. Therefore, those who would come to *Cathy* generally already had an interest in either the company or issues of homelessness. Likewise, those who would come to *We Know Not* had an interest in the company, in the issue of environmental crisis, or wished to see one of the 'visionary speakers'[75]. This is significant as a key element of a useful democratic space is inclusivity and the primary purpose of seeking inclusivity is to ensure there is a diversity of views and perspectives within the space. Given the self-selecting nature of the audience, there was generally a shared political position on the key issues within the piece – although alternative perspectives and disagreements on how to address these issues were present in both case studies.

The broad political homogeneity of the audience is also detrimental to the notion of the common good. According to the Arendtian perspective adopted in this thesis, homogeneity is an issue in terms of achieving the pluralism needed for a useful democratic space. A useful democratic space requires a broad range of perspectives, opinions and experiences. Whilst disagreement and differing perspectives were evidently present in both case studies, there is a concern that these disagreements still sat within a broadly left-wing political consensus. Again, this goes beyond these two case studies. As explored in chapter 3, most participatory theatre practice (understood in terms of applied theatre and Claire Bishop's work) finds its origins in socialist and social democratic movements. For example, the origins of Theatre of the Oppressed are strongly rooted in the

[75] These speakers generally came from left-wing perspectives (i.e. socialist and social democratic). The left-wing speakers were also most popular, for example, the slots in which Paul Mason and Andrew Simms spoke sold out most quickly.

Worker's Party[76] and socialist movements of Brazil and Peru. This is problematic in terms of including and engaging with a broad range of political positions, as it limits the scope and depth of disagreement within the space.

Another potential barrier to engagement and inclusivity was price. Prices for *Cathy* differed depending on venue, but broadly, both *Cathy* and *We Know Not* were priced at roughly £10-
£20. This excludes the perspectives of those who do not have the disposable income to afford the ticket price, and is a disincentive for speculative audiences who do not wish to take a financial risk on the performance. It is important to note that there were concessionary rates for both productions and both companies made a significant efforts to offer free tickets to key demographics. In Cardboard Citizens' case this was for those working in fields related to housing, or those with experience of homelessness (this offer had excellent take-up as the company have very established networks in this field). For the *We Know Not* performances at the Barbican Arts Centre, roughly 20% of the audience attended with free tickets. In each audience slot one third of tickets available were offered, for free, to young people living locally (via the venue and producer's networks with schools and youth groups), as well as the community groups who had engaged with the development of the piece.

Another potential barrier, is that these events took place within theatres, and defined themselves as theatre events. The majority of the UK population do not attend theatre performances. The most recent DCMS 'Taking Part' survey found that only 21.4% of the general population attended a play/drama in the past 12 months. The same survey found that the most common reason for respondents who did not engage in arts activities was not financial, but "because they were not interested" (Pyle, 2019). This presents a limitation for the usefulness of participatory theatre as a democratic space, as many people in the UK are not interested in participating in theatre. A key element of democratic spaces is inclusivity, a sense that everyone is able to participate. The inclusivity of both of these productions was limited by

[76] Both Boal and Freire were members of the Worker's Party in Brazil (or *Partido dos Trabalhadores,* commonly known as PT), and, whilst living in Peru, both worked on literacy projects iniatiated by Juan Velasco Alvarado's 'revolutionary government' in the 1970s (Babbage, 2004).

their positionality as theatre pieces, because A) there is a cost barrier and B) there is a limited proportion of the population who actually attend theatre events.

8.6 Conclusion

From my empirical research, I have found that there are major limitations to participatory theatre as a form of democratic space in terms of inclusivity and political efficacy. However, both case studies offered distinctive opportunities to improve understanding and create alternative approaches to democratic spaces. For example, in the case of *Cathy,* a particular emphasis on emotions and mood sets it apart from traditional democratic spaces – in ways that facilitate listening and a broad range of approaches to discourse. Or, in *We Know Not,* the creation of a liminal space, through performance and design, contributes to the facilitation of imagination and a belief in alternatives within the space.

The key findings from this thesis suggest both opportunities and limitations to the potential role of participatory theatre as democratic space. Both *We Know Not* and *Cathy* provide spaces in which strangers exchange ideas on the common good and play with alternative visions for the future, often within an environment conducive to respectful listening and exchange. They both offer distinctive approaches to political discourse itself, which can disrupt traditional hierarchies of expertise and allow for a broader range of participants to contribute to the conversation. Through these opportunities, these case studies provide insights into what useful democratic spaces could be, and offer distinctive approaches on creating playful, emotional and imaginative democratic spaces.

However, there are also significant limitations to this approach to creating democratic spaces in terms of inclusivity and political efficacy. Whilst these limitations are not specific to these case studies, they were present in both.

In the next and final chapter of this thesis I will lay out the overall conclusions of this research, explore potential routes by which these findings may be taken forward, and directly address the political, and artistic, implications of this research.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

Participatory theatre projects, like those explored in this thesis, can contribute to creating democratic spaces in a number of important and distinctive ways. However, these projects also face significant limitations, which are mostly beyond the potential influence or control of the theatre makers creating these spaces. The social and political implications of neoliberalism (as laid out in chapter 2) have undermined democracy in the UK, and participatory theatre does present distinctive opportunities for overcoming some of these limitations. However, paradoxically, some of the social and political implications of neoliberalism have also undermined the potential of participatory theatre as a useful democratic space. For example, growing social inequalities (resulting from neoliberal policies) has had knock-on effects on the inclusivity of arts spaces. Overall, participatory theatre offers ways to overcome some of the limitations placed on democracy by neoliberalism, yet it is also itself partially restricted by the effects of a neoliberal system. As addressed later in this chapter, neoliberal policy and rationality is not solely to blame for the limitations of participatory theatre as a democratic space, but they do compound these issues, and given the starting point and justification for this thesis, it is important to address this.

To restate the normative position put forward in chapter 1: this research rests on the assumption that a healthy democracy is a desirable goal for society. There are many rationales for why democracy may be desirable, and I will only re-state one key reason as it has particular significance to this project: a healthy democracy is crucial to environmental sustainability and the notion of sustainable prosperity. This claim is based on empirical evidence which suggests a positive correlation between democratic practices and progressive environmental policy (Niemeyer, 2019). As well as the convincing theoretical argument that sustainability is a long term project and one which requires the ongoing support and engagement of citizens. Arguably, a key way to achieve this long-term support and engagement is to involve citizens in the creation and maintenance of environmental policy (Dryzek, 2014; Hausknost & Hammond, 2020) –as laid out in chapter 1 of this thesis. This research has been about

exploring routes to a more democratic society, not only as an end in itself, but also a crucial means of achieving a more sustainable future.

As argued in earlier chapters, the current system of governance in the UK is a hollowed-out version of democracy. Decades of neoliberal policy and rationality have undermined democracy in the UK and have contributed to a significant rise in populist personalities and rhetoric (Brown, 2019; Inglehart & Norris, 2016). It has been the aim of this thesis to explore how we may strengthen democracy and narrow the gap between our current system of governance and the ideals of democratic theorists like Arendt, Dewey and Rousseau. In this chapter I will conclude my investigation into the ways in which 'narrowing of the gap' can be supported by participatory theatre.

Recent political developments in the UK portray a shift away from the neoliberal paradigm and a rise in populism within the political mainstream (Müller, 2017). The threat to democracy is similar in this new political landscape – again, political alternatives and pluralist approaches to discourse are denied. However, rather than deriding them as idealistic and unrealistic (as with the neoliberal rationality), populist leaders attack alternative political approaches views as immoral, corrupt and, perhaps ironically, undemocratic. Pragmatic and evidence-based politics is out of favour in exchange for an anti-elitist rhetoric which rejects 'experts' (Gove, 2016). Beyond these specific threats to democracy, for some, the rise in populism has forced questions of whether democracy is the most effective system by which to achieve social and environmental justice. "…the rise of populists claiming to represent the authentic will of the people, has thrown into some disarray established and normative notions on democracy we have taken for granted" (Clammer & Vickery, 2019).

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to address the rise in populism, its impacts on democracy, and the potential role of theatre in addressing these threats. In

future research, I hope to apply the work of this thesis[77] to this new political landscape. Given the overlaps between neoliberalism and populism, particularly in terms of the causes for a rise in populist rhetoric[78] and the anti-pluralism present in both, I believe there is significant transferability in the findings of this research to discussions of the populist threat to democracy.

In concluding this thesis, it is also important to re-state my own positionality in relation to this subject. Alongside my interest and background in Political Theory, I am a theatre-maker. One of my specialisms as a theatre-maker has been, and continues to be, participatory theatre. I am also a member of numerous sector-wide networks focussed on the social and political role of the arts, such as What Next and Culture Declares. As outlined in chapters 1 and 4, this positionality is a significant motivator for this research. It is because of this work, combined with a research interest in political participation, which stimulated an interest in the potential connections between the two. This positionality offered me improved access within my empirical research, as well as a practical and in-depth understanding of the theatre sector more broadly. However, it also comes with potential biases. There is a risk that, as I work within theatre, I would have a vested interest in its success within this study. As a theatre practitioner, a motivation for this research has been to better understand my own practice. To create useful work, it is crucial to understand what this kind of practice can *and cannot* do. It is also important to note that prior to commencing this research I was aware of the failings of the theatre sector in terms of inclusivity: indeed, it is a common subject of discussion within numerous projects and discussion events I have both participated in and lead. Therefore, I was aware this would likely be a limitation in terms of its potential as a useful democratic space. However, I was also keen to investigate other

[77] For example, a distinctive element of participatory theatre as a democratic space is its approach to emotional expression as a valued form of political expression. Emotion and mood are also frequently incited in populist rhetoric - indeed, this is often portrayed as a negative aspect of populism. However, as Latour (2013) and Davies (2019) argue, including values and emotional responses to issues is crucial to political discourse – particularly in relation to climate crisis. Arguably, the affective approach of theatre may speak more effectively than traditional democratic spaces to the affective approach of populism.

[78] Wendy Brown argues that neoliberalism has been key to the rise in populism: "the neoliberal attack on the social…is key to generating an *antidemocratic culture from below* while building and legitimating an *antidemocratic forms of state power from above*" (Brown, 2019, p. 28, emphasis in original).

opportunities afforded by this approach to democratic spaces.

From my analysis of two in-depth case studies, I have found distinctive opportunities offered by participatory theatre in relation to the importance of imagination in democratic spaces, as well as facilitating discourse focussed on the common good. There is also evidence to suggest that they can be useful for creating a space for meaningful exchange and listening. In some ways participatory theatre supports inclusivity, in that the form enables different approaches of political expression within the space. However, in other ways inclusivity is very limited: as previously discussed, theatre, as a sector, struggles to reach a broad and diverse audience, which also has an impact on the plurality of these spaces. Participatory theatre also generally lacks political efficacy in terms of a meaningful relationship with formal political institutions - although some projects, including both the projects explored in this thesis, do support other forms of political efficacy. Overall, neither of these case studies can directly be defined as useful democratic spaces, although there is much to learn from both in terms of alternative approaches to creating and facilitating democratic spaces going forwards. To unpick and organise these arguments I shall return to the five key elements of democratic space which have featured throughout this thesis. In the final section of this chapter I will offer potential next steps for research into this field, aimed at routes to overcome some of the limitations faced by participatory theatre in terms of creating democratic space.

9.1 Inclusivity

Inclusivity is a fundamental component of a useful democratic space. A key factor in the accountability and political legitimacy of the space is that a broad and diverse range of people have taken part. This can be seen in simple ways like the number of signatures on a petition, or in terms of the diversity of views and perspectives represented within a community forum. As outlined in chapter 2 of this thesis, inclusivity does not only refer to the numbers present, but also to the modes of communication available. For a democratic space to be adequately inclusive, attention must be paid to both who can access the space (i.e. in terms of representation), but also that everyone feels able to contribute to the discourse within the space.

Inclusivity is a difficult issue for the theatre sector (Brook, O'Brien, & Taylor, 2018; Neelands et al., 2015; Pyle, 2019), as well as for many civic and formal political spaces. The quantitative data from my case studies suggests that both METIS and Cardboard Citizens sought to address the broader failure of inclusivity that exists within the sector. Cardboard Citizens has a track record of engaging with the homeless and organisations which work with the homeless – a group who are rarely represented amongst theatre audiences. This group is a key target audience for the company and, as explored in chapter 6, the usefulness of the forums in the Forum Theatre tour of *Cathy* somewhat depend on representation from those with these kinds of experience. Therefore, as they toured the country they reached out through these networks, offering free tickets. Through this activity, they did manage to ensure representation from these groups. In many of the performances I attended (particularly matinees), the audience was almost solely comprised of those attending with these free tickets. This is also reflected in their Audience Agency statistics, 17% of their audiences were from the 'Kaleidoscope Creativity' segment – which is described in the following way "…the majority are council tenants… they are culturally diverse, but often economically challenged, are to be found in inner city areas or the suburbs of large cities…" (Audience Agency, 2020). There are ten Audience Agency segments, Cardboard Citizens had representation from all of them on their tours of *Cathy,* which portrays the diversity of their reach. However, the most well represented group was 'Metroculturals', who made up 37% of the audience (yet only make up 5% of English households), who are "are highly active socially and passionate about arts and culture. They are confident and knowledgeable in their preferences, diverse in age and background but united by their high-levels of education, well-paid jobs, *liberal outlook* and active lifestyles" (Audience Agency, 2020 – emphasis added). The significant overrepresentation from this segment is consistent with most theatre audiences (over half of this segment attended a play within the past 12 months) and a consistency in a 'liberal outlook' is important in terms of exploring disagreement and notions of the common good (addressed below) within a democratic space.

As in the case of Cardboard Citizens, METIS took measures to reach beyond a

usual theatre- going audience. They arranged free tickets for ‘young people and those from disadvantaged groups’ (terms used by the company in monitoring and evaluation). These free tickets were offered through partnerships with local community support organisations adjacent to the Barbican Arts Centre, namely within the boroughs of Hackney and Tower Hamlets. In total, 9% of their audience was drawn from these groups, and a further 20% attended with free tickets as they had been involved in development workshops of the piece – these workshop participants were mostly comprised of students, aspiring theatre makers and community groups attached to other partner arts organisations (for example, the Two Boroughs group at The Young Vic theatre in Waterloo[79]). As they did not use the Audience Agency to analyse their audience demographics I cannot report on representation in terms of demographic segments.

In terms of addressing inclusivity within theatre attendance, both companies achieved above average representation from groups with traditionally low arts engagement. However, it is still not sufficient for the levels of inclusivity needed for a useful democratic space, not least because neither of these projects were free and open to all. In both case studies, and many other theatre projects, unless audiences were specifically contacted, these events cost money. Alongside this financial barrier, there are social and cultural barriers of engagement with theatre. As discussed in chapter 8, in the DCMS’s ‘Taking Part’ survey, the majority of non- attenders stated their reason for lack of attendance as “not interested” (Pyle, 2019). This crucial barrier of interest becomes particularly apparent for contemporary and experimental theatre (such as participatory theatre), as opposed to more commercial work. For example, of the Kaleidoscope Creativity group (defined by the Audience Agency), 8% have attended ‘Contemporary’ arts events in the past 12 months, whilst 36% have attended ‘Popular’ arts events (such as musicals or pantomime) (Audience Agency, 2020)[80]. Overall, the case studies explored in

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[79] This initiative, now known as ‘Neighborhood Theatre’, invites residents in Lambeth and Southwark to attend workshops and offers them opportunities for free tickets to shows.

[80] This relates to a much broader discourse on notions of ‘high’ and ‘popular’ art (Bourdieu, 1984; O'Brien, 2013). Overall, I am not attempting to make a claim about the status of participatory theatre as a ‘high’ or ‘popular’ art form, only to state that, according to Audience Agency definitions, participatory theatre falls into the ‘Contemporary’ rather than ‘Popular’

this thesis did try to overcome these barriers, and, to some extent, succeeded.

However, participatory theatre projects will always have to work hard to achieve meaningful inclusivity due to their positionality[81] as 'contemporary' theatre, as well as issues with diversity and inclusion that exist within the sector at large. This challenges their potential usefulness as democratic spaces as they must begin from a more difficult starting point than more neutral democratic spaces[82] to achieve inclusivity.

This issue applies to all theatre events which were ticketed and occurred within theatres, like both of my case studies. However, as discussed in chapter 3, there is a significant amount of participatory theatre which occurs outside of arts spaces, without charge, which is specifically aimed at including participants and audiences from underrepresented demographics (in terms of their engagement with theatre). Indeed, this is a foundational approach for Cardboard Citizens – much of their work takes place in hostels and community centres around the country. The artists in these projects act as facilitators and their role is to create a platform by which participants can create their own Forum Theatre pieces. This work is also known as participatory theatre – however it is not the same approach that I have been discussing in this thesis. Projects like this have a different approach to inclusivity: namely because they are often targeting a specific community, rather than trying to draw in a broad audience. A good amount of work has been done on the political and social implications of participation in the process of creation (eg. Matarasso, 1997; Matarasso, 2019; Prentki & Preston, 2009; Sloman, 2011). As outlined in chapter 3, this study has taken a different perspective[83] by focussing on work

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category.

[81] By its 'positionality' I mean: how this work is marketed, the types of venues it is likely to tour to and the target audiences marketing departments are likely to reach out to for this kind of work. All of these factors will influence its potential inclusivity.

[82] It is important to note that most traditional democratic spaces – such as participatory budgeting and protest movements like Occupy, as explored in Chapter 2 – also struggle with ensuring a wide and diverse range of participants attend. Who engages with politics and the failure of equal representation is explored extensively within the literature on democratic theory. However, participatory theatre projects have to contend not only with barriers of political engagement, but also barriers of arts engagement.

[83] This is an original contribution to the exploration of the political role of participatory theatre, and different challenges to inclusivity has arisen as a result.

in which the 'participatory' element refers primarily to its performance rather than its creation, and has focussed on the experience of the audience, rather than its creators and participants.

Despite the challenges of achieving a reach and diversity representative of the broader population, participatory theatre is well suited for providing a range of modes of communication within the space. Within both case studies there were multiple and varied opportunities for citizens to contribute to the discourse. Some took the form of small discussions with those around you, others were more performative, and emotional expressions sat alongside more traditional forms of political discourse, based on policy and theoretical knowledge. Therefore, although the diversity of the audiences within these participatory theatre projects was limited, the ways in which citizens were able to contribute within the space was varied – enabling a wide range of approaches to discourse.

Overall, the inclusivity which participatory theatre projects like these are likely to achieve is limited and this is a significant barrier to creating useful democratic spaces. Until there is progress on this issue within the theatre sector more broadly, participatory theatre will struggle to achieve meaningful inclusion and therefore cannot be considered a useful democratic space. However, there may well be projects which overcome this limitation by approaching audience recruitment in different ways – e.g. free, largescale events in non-arts spaces (such as *Nowhere Island* by Situations), or projects which select audiences from specific demographics by sortition (such as *Immersion* by Selina Thompson). There is certainly scope for further research in terms of exploring alternative approaches to audience development[84], to ensure inclusivity within these events.

9.2 Listening and exchange

In a democratic space there must be opportunities to voice political views and ideas, and there must also be opportunities for listening, meaningful exchange and disagreement between citizens. It is important to reiterate that by listening

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[84] Audience development is a significant area of investigation within the sector, as well as within Theatre Studies. There is scope to bring this literature and work into future investigations into the overlaps between participatory theatre and democratic spaces.

within democratic spaces, I am not implying an empathetic or compassionate act. In this context, the need for listening is a way of understanding alternative perspectives, drawing out conflict and allowing for the exchange of ideas amongst citizens. It is through listening that we recognise difference and plurality: the act of listening itself acknowledges and seeks out difference. Without difference we would not need to listen (Dobson, 2014). This plurality is essential within a democratic space: ensuring inclusivity means little if, within the space, there is no listening or exchange of ideas and perspectives. Listening as a political act is also linked to power dynamics: who has the ability to be heard, and who has the power to make change. There must be a degree of political equality between participants for meaningful exchange to occur, which can "create a realm of peers, where we are neither ruling nor being ruled, but engaging with one another in joint speech and action" (Bickford, 1996, p. 57). The act of listening itself can be an equaliser, as the act of listening requires the listener to acknowledge and even attempt to understand whomever is speaking. "Listening is, at one and same time, an expression of power and a means of redistributing it" (Dobson, 2014, p. 58). Within both examples of participatory theatre explored in this research, careful consideration was paid to how to facilitate disagreement and listening within the space. Both offer opportunities for learning here in terms of the quality of listening and exchange, which was generally achieved in both. However, as shown in previous chapters, there were notable exceptions to this.

In both case studies, disagreement between audience members was a driver for conversation, the action of the performance, and an enjoyable element of the experience for those attending both *We Know Not* and *Cathy.* Both case studies invited their audiences to discuss and experiment with explicitly political issues with their fellow audience members who were, mostly, complete strangers. A number of interviewees (for both case studies) spoke of how this opportunity to discuss political issues with strangers was highly unusual for them, and very welcome, and many went on to have follow-on conversations with others about the issues explored in these pieces after attending the performances. The exceptional nature of this opportunity to discuss politics is reinforced by broader studies. For example, the Hansard Society's (2019) latest *Audit of*

Political Engagement found that 30% of people never talk about politics at all, and a further 19% spoke of politics very rarely (less than monthly). These are concerning statistics in terms of democracy in the UK. My research shows that participatory theatre spaces can provide opportunities for these rare political exchanges to occur, which, as explored below, is a crucial factor in creating a 'deliberative culture'.

Two recurring themes throughout my interviews for both case studies was the ease and respectful nature of disagreement within the space, as well as a sense of comradery amongst the audience. In both pieces, disagreement fuelled conversation and, simultaneously, there was a clear sense of working towards a common goal. This combination was key to creating listening and exchange amongst citizens within these spaces. As I shall return to in relation to the common good later on, this combination of disagreement and a shared purpose, is crucial to the practice of democracy.

Evidence from these case studies suggests a number of factors contributed to these participatory theatre events achieving this distinctive combination. These factors overlap substantially with the artistic nature of the projects. In other words, what makes these projects artistically effective and what makes these projects good at facilitating exchange, were often one and the same. For example, casting the audience as active players within the action of the story is a key component of participatory theatre, and was an effective means of imbuing a sense of comradery and common purpose. Playful and theatrical approaches to facilitation of the space were also crucial. In *Cathy,* as in all Forum and Legislative Theatre, this role was performed by the Joker – who actively enabled multiple voices to be heard, made sure these offerings were understood and discussed, as well as ensuring the interventions remained entertaining throughout the forum. In other participatory theatre pieces, like *We Know Not,* the facilitation of the experience was done through design elements, such as disruptive sounds, doors opening, written instructions and visual cues. In these performances the audience is led through the experience with minimal direct instruction from the performers, forcing them to become more autonomous as they find their way through the piece. The design of the space casts the audience in specific roles and, in seeking their way through, audiences

are provoked into discussions with strangers.

However, there were limitations to the quality of listening and exchange within these spaces, namely because both depended on a certain level of political agreement to begin with. This may not be the case with all participatory theatre projects, but was certainly present in both case studies explored in this research. Whilst disagreement was rife within both *Cathy* and *We Know Not,* these conversations were often based on an underlying assumption of similar political starting points. This relates back to the issues of inclusivity within the space: that the majority of audiences for *Cathy* were 'Metroculturals', who, according to the Audience Agency, share a 'liberal outlook'. The assumption of a left-wing political starting point was also reflected in the political contexts of the performances. For example, the starting point in all of the forums for *Cathy* was that homelessness is a social issue that should be politically and socially addressed, namely through state solutions and policy changes. Given the overtly socialist origins of Theatre of the Oppressed, the medium itself is arguably set up with a left- wing political perspective. As spoken about in chapter 5 and 6, on some occasions, interventions which challenged this starting point were not made welcome within the forum, which is problematic within a democratic space. Conflict is crucial to democracy, and we cannot limit those conflicts to certain subjects. This theme will be drawn out further as I turn my attention to the discourse on the common good.

9.3 Discourse on the common good

Throughout this thesis, in referring to the common good, I am drawing primarily on Hannah Arendt's 'public realm'. The conception of the common good presented in this thesis states that democratic discourse requires an emphasis on the interests of the collective. Disagreement on what constitutes the 'interests of the collective' is welcome, and within a useful democratic space, actively encouraged. However, the focus point for a useful democratic space is the common good, as a shared goal amongst the gathered citizens. This is in contrast to the Schumpeterian approach to democratic participation, as outlined in chapter 2. Schumpeter actively rejects the notion of the common good in his 'elitist model' in which each individual votes for their personal

preference and the preference with the majority wins. The common good, as understood within this thesis, is not the aggregate of individual preferences, but recognizes citizens as part of a collective. Within a useful democratic space, citizens seek means by which to achieve a common good for the collective.

There can sometimes be contradiction between the importance of enabling disagreement and plurality, as discussed above, whilst simultaneously requiring an emphasis on 'the good of the collective' as a starting point. This poses a dilemma for the democratic space, as it seeks to welcome a broad range of views, yet also requires citizens to act as part of a collective. The position taken in this thesis is that there must be a common purpose as a starting point for a democratic space. This purpose is to address how we may govern, change or improve society for all. To begin all democratic spaces with the requirement of a focus on this purpose, and an assumption that the issue at hand *may* have a political solution, may exclude certain perspectives. However, it requires these starting points in order to be a useful democratic space.

Both of my case studies were focussed on the common good. The central task of the audience in both was to seek out means of improving society, discuss routes to sustainability and experiment with ways of overcoming oppressions. This is important to creating a democratic space, and it challenges the neoliberal rationality of individualism and 'homoeconomicus' by explicitly casting audiences as citizens, with important perspectives and ideas for the common good. The audience in participatory theatre is often given a common task and, in both case studies, there was a clear sense of collectivity within these spaces. As laid out in previous chapters, this collectivity was achieved through playfulness, mood and the liminal qualities of the work.

Within participatory theatre events there are often pre-existing political biases, which may challenge the plurality of the space. In both *Cathy* and *We Know Not,* the political perspectives of the theatre makers who created the piece were apparent in the work. As argued in chapter 8, the plurality of these spaces was challenged by the broadly left-leaning nature of the self-selecting audience, and the left-wing history of participatory theatre more broadly. As demonstrated in chapters 5-7, this did not stop disagreements

and exchange of alternative perspectives. Both *Cathy* and *We Know Not* generally supported a significant amount of disagreement. However, the scope of this disagreement, in terms of essential political values, was perhaps limited.

To consider each in turn: *Cathy* was explicitly focussed on homelessness and seeking ways of addressing this social issue. The audience is self-selecting, and as noted above, there are issues terms of including differing perspectives here as, for the most part, those who attend will be those with an interest in this topic. There were two main political assumptions that framed the discussion within the space: first that homelessness is a tragic issue which needs addressing, and second, that it is an issue which requires a political solution. I would argue that both of these assumptions are consistent with the initial requirements of a democratic space more generally, as outlined above. However, there were instances in which opposing political views were made unwelcome in the space – for example, the instance of the 'fatalistic Tory' (JP200718) at the Edinburgh Fringe. This interviewee reported that this audience member expressed the view that as *"there will always be people like Cathy – there is nothing we can do*". Their contribution was 'shut down' very quickly and there was no opportunity for expansion on this view – which may have been useful to the discourse. However, as stated in earlier chapters, this was an example of poor facilitation, rather than a characteristic of the show or the technique of Forum Theatre more generally.

We Know Not covered a much broader range of issues, as the show was designed with the complexity of environmental and social justice in mind. In making this piece, the company sought to explore how we may create a sustainable and socially just world. This ambition itself contains the assumption that all agree that the current political system is failing and change is needed for social and environmental justice. The content of the piece was also predominately left-leaning, in terms of the speakers who were invited (e.g. Paul Mason and Andrew Simms), and the policy proposals offered to the audience (for example, a Universal Basic Income and E. O. Wilson's *Half Earth* proposal). Many audience members in exit interviews commented that the piece was '*not radical enough'* (e.g. wanted to see proposals like '*the*

nationalisation of all land' – Exit interview 050918), whilst others commented that it was too left-wing and 'utopian'. With hundreds of policy proposals making up the content of the piece, as well as the influence audience members had on each other's experience, the political biases of the piece were likely experienced quite differently by each audience member. Therefore, it is difficult to pin down any specific political biases presented in the piece – although it can be said that the piece was broadly left-wing in terms of approach and content.

Overall, both pieces provided useful opportunities for discourse focussed on the common good. However, at times, the starting points and contexts offered for these discussions contained too much political bias and made it difficult for any significant political disagreements to occur. This was also true of the audiences attending these pieces: as explored earlier, regular theatre going audiences like the Audience Agency's 'Metroculturals', who likely made up a significant proportion of the audiences for both pieces, tend to have a 'liberal outlook'. Therefore, the political biases of the spaces was not only due to the assumption and viewpoints of the companies creating the work, but also those in attendance.

9. 4 Imagination and a belief in alternatives

Imagining alternatives, and believing they are possible, is crucial to democracy. Within democratic spaces citizens are invited to discuss and explore potential political and social changes. An important part of this is imagining what that change might be. Various scholars (Brown, 2019; Davies, 2017; Levitas, 2017) have suggested that imagination may have a role to play in overcoming the threats to democracy presented by neoliberalism. To envision possible alternatives and to counter current narratives is an inherently pluralist project. As such, it challenges the anti-pluralism of neoliberalism, which purports that there is only one 'common sense' approach to governance (Thatcher, 1988). Ruth Levitas has been particularly influential in this field, arguing that "the imagination of a potential, different society in the future draws attention to the need for change, offers a direction towards that change, and a stimulus to action in the present" (2017). Both the case studies explored in this thesis do this:

asking their audiences to become an active part in imagining alternative societies and exploring directions towards that change, and both highlight the crucial need for change (*Cathy* in relation to housing policy, and *We Know Not* in relation to sustainability). The practice of imagining the world otherwise is foundational to both pieces.

As addressed in chapters 5 and 6, *Cathy* provides a space to play with, and imagine alternative approaches to, overcoming oppressions. The 'game' of Forum and Legislative Theatre is to reinterpret the oppressive narrative presented, and to play out and discuss potential alternatives. The importance of this opportunity to imagine ways things could be different was mentioned frequently in the post-show interviews. Audiences found this important as it highlighted, or reinforced, the sense that *"things don't need to be like this"* (JH050318). Even for those who

did not intervene, the invitation to do so stayed with them and they continued to question what could have been different for Cathy and how it could have been different, for months after seeing the show. In chapter 6 I drew on the idea of prefigurative politics to frame this argument: by prefiguring alternative political ideas we can make them seem like a more plausible future.

Beyond the content of the interventions, it is also important to note the importance of the symbolism of the invitation for intervention. The act of inviting audiences up on the stage to change the story is politically significant. With this invitation, Cardboard Citizens are inviting audiences to enter the space of 'meaning-making' (i.e. the stage), and alter the outcomes of the story depicted. It re-casts audiences as citizens with an active role to play in the re-writing of the story. For Augusto Boal, as well as many of the audience members I interviewed for this research for both *Cathy* and *We Know Not*, there is a relationship between this symbolic gesture within the theatre and political action in reality.

We Know Not was also focussed around the act of entering a fictional space, in which the audience became active citizens, or 'factory workers' in the 'factory of the future', tasked with re-designing society. This was an imaginative exercise for the audience: asking them to 'suspend their disbelief' (Walton,

1980) and become a character within the fiction. From the positionality of a fictional and playful space, the ‘factory workers’ of *We Know Not* were better able to challenge the current neoliberal political consensus, and explore far-reaching and improbable alternatives without the usual limitations of reality.

Overall, there is a distinctive and useful contribution for creating democratic spaces offered by participatory theatre (and potentially other kinds of artistic events) in terms of facilitating imaginative and playful spaces. The act of creating a fictional world, and inviting audience members to play an active role within it, is a crucial part of the artistic creation of participatory theatre, and it also provides a unique way of creating democratic spaces that emphasise the importance of imagining alternatives.

9.5 Political efficacy

The final element of democratic space explored in this thesis is political efficacy. This element relates to the impact of the space in terms of its political implications beyond the space. The term political efficacy has been used to describe a range of outcomes, which I have broadly divided into three interrelated sub-groups: a) policy influence, b) political literacy (understanding of process or issue) and c) political confidence (recognition of self as political actor). Overall, for a democratic space to be useful, it must have a relationship with policy-making and the state, and aim to create political change (although this could be a long term goal rather than an immediate one). Democratic spaces needn’t be led by the state, they may also take the form of lobbying and protest movements.

As outlined in chapter 8, this presents a significant limitation for participatory theatre as a democratic space. Whilst there is evidence from the data that both *We Know Not* and *Cathy* contributed to audiences’ political literacy and political confidence (which is drawn out in chapters 6 and 7), neither were able to influence policy. Their positionality as theatre events means that participatory theatre can struggle to be seen as a legitimate form of political participation, nor is it necessarily the aim of theatre makers to play this formal political role. This was certainly true of *We Know Not.* METIS had no ambitions towards policy change, although they did have political aims in terms

of raising awareness about key issues and facilitating a space for political discourse on these issues, and audiences were very much invited to regard themselves as political actors within the space. However, little to no attention was given to how the piece may impact upon formal politics or policy-making beyond the space.

This was different for *Cathy,* and Cardboard Citizens' work more broadly. The company works closely with campaigning organisations, and a number of local authorities and high-profile politicians. These are relationships they have built in their 30 years of work and campaigning within the housing sector. The choice to tour *Cathy* as a Legislative Theatre piece (in its first tour) was rooted in their desire to influence policy on the issue of homelessness. They collected policy suggestions everywhere they went. They had the support and attendance from politicians throughout the tour. They performed within the House of Lords and at the Labour Party Conference in 2017. However, both of these performances were abridged versions and lacked the forum element. From my interviews (and from evidence gathered from Twitter and blogs), the piece was predominately seen by politicians as a means of raising awareness and emotionally reinforcing the need for policy change, rather than an approach to policy-making in its own right.

When Boal created Legislative Theatre, he was in the unique position of being both a theatre practitioner and a policy-maker, and hence creating an approach to policy-making through theatre was possible. Whilst there have been theatre companies since who enacted Legislative Theatre with some policy-making success (for example, Theatre of the Oppressed NYC[85]), this was not the primary aim for Cardboard Citizens when making *Cathy*. There is evidence that Cardboard Citizens' other work has had policy impact – namely their work with local councils (the *Priority Needs* project) and their campaigning work with Shelter. However, *Cathy* was not initially set up to create policy change, and, as outlined in chapters 3 and 5, the Legislative Theatre projects which have been successful have involved policy-makers from very early stages and sought

[85] As mentioned in chapter 3, TONYC hosted annual Legislative Theatre festivals, building relationships over time with policy-makers and communities and have had significant policy influence within the city (Kelly- Golfman, 2018).

ways of mirroring specific policy-making processes.

This perhaps portrays the inflexibility of how policy-making is done, and the limited ways which citizens can get involved in formal policy-making, as well as the failure of participatory theatre to fit into policy-making systems. As touched upon in chapter 2, political participation in the UK is divided (Birch, 2013); there is ever declining trust in political processes and politicians (Flinders, 2012); and citizens increasingly feel that they have no influence at all over national decision making (Hansard Society, 2019). Decades of neoliberalism and widespread privatisation and depoliticisation has undermined accountability within the public sector and limited opportunities for citizens to take part in democratic decision making in relation to public services (Fenton, 2018a; Hay, 2007). There have been widespread calls for democratic renewal and reform (Brown, 2015, 2019; Elster, 1986; Young, 2000), not least from the environmental movement, with groups like Extinction Rebellion demanding citizens' assemblies. Democratic theorists, like John Dryzek, have also argued that deliberative democracy is crucial to achieving environmental sustainability (Dryzek & Pickering, 2017). As addressed in chapter 1, a growing number of democratic theorists are interested in the role of the arts within democratic renewal (Chou et al., 2015; Coleman, 2020; Hammond & Ward, 2019; Mattern & Love, 2013; Ryan & Flinders, 2018). Arguably, the failure of participatory theatre to impact upon policy may be, at least in part, due to issues within the current political system, rather than issues specific to theatre. This raises important and urgent questions on what democratic spaces should and could be – particularly in terms of the overlooked importance of playfulness, emotion and imagination within formal political discourse and traditional democratic spaces. Nevertheless, whilst these issues exist, the potential policy impact of participatory theatre is severely limited, which in turn limits its potential as a useful democratic space.

9.6 Next steps and closing remarks

Before concluding this research, I wish to offer two potential routes forward for this line of inquiry, both of which are related to the limitations articulated above. The first addresses this failure of political efficacy in relation to theatre's formal political influence. Neither of these case studies directly impacted upon

policy, not least as neither of them explicitly aimed to do so. However, a key factor in this has also been the failure of formal politics to recognise theatre practice as a valid or useful form of policy-making in its own right. As demonstrated in chapters 6 and 8, participatory theatre is often seen as a means of raising awareness or a symbolic gesture towards political change, but often fails to achieve policy-impact. In response to this limitation, and in response to a growing interest in citizens' assemblies (furthered by Extinction Rebellion), there is an opportunity for practice-based research which explores the potential benefits of conducting a citizens' assembly process as a participatory theatre piece. This research could offer significant learning opportunities in terms of how we approach formal deliberative spaces in playful, imaginative and inclusive ways.

A major obstacle for this project would be finding a formal political institution willing to host and meaningfully support such an experiment. There is also a significant risk here of tokenistic political engagement (Arnstein, 1969). As is the case in many participatory policy-making initiatives, within citizens' assemblies the ultimate power to alter policy remains with the policy-makers. The dependence on the state for legitimacy is a trait regularly criticized in various forms of participatory and deliberative democracy. As touched upon in chapter 2, Floridia (2013) argues deliberative democracy offers only a tokenistic form of citizen empowerment. Although citizens are brought into the decision-making process, often the final decision will fundamentally rest with policy-makers. Overall, there are frequently significant barriers to meaningful citizen engagement within traditional citizens' assembly scenarios, which would need to be addressed. However, creating a citizens assembly using participatory theatre methodology would also present a means of overcoming issues of inclusivity, as the recruitment for a citizens' assembly does not face the same cost/cultural barriers present in theatre.

The second route for future research in this field addresses the potential role for participatory theatre in contributing to a broader 'deliberative culture' – as discussed in chapter 1 of this thesis. Hammond (2019) argues that to achieve lasting environmental and social sustainability, a strong democratic culture is required: "…sustainability governance requires not only technical-scientific

and managerial capacity, but also widespread democratic engagement able to foster a collective re-thinking of taken-for-granted views" (p.174). This links closely with the findings of this research: Hammond (2019) argues that meaningful action on climate change fundamentally depends on a belief in alternatives – or, as she puts it, 'transformability', as well as a commitment to sustainability. This requires a more holistic relationship between democracy and sustainability. Rather than one-off (and sometimes tokenistic) democratic interventions like citizens' assemblies, we must create a 'deliberative culture' which cultivates "critical thinking, confrontation with alternative views, and a sense of openness of the society's future, such that citizens can play an active role in shaping it against those with a vested interest in the unsustainable status quo" (Hammond & Ward, 2019). This requires a broad cultural shift in systems of governance, as well as citizens' perceptions of their own relationship with these systems. I argue that this thesis has shown that participatory theatre may have a useful role to play in contributing to a shift toward a 'deliberative culture'. There are undoubtedly limitations to this – particularly in relation to its reach and inclusivity, and overcoming these limitations would need to become a primary focus if this line of inquiry was taken forwards. However, in terms of fostering a sense of transformability, as well as facilitating a space for critical thinking and active citizenship, participatory theatre may have a significant and distinctive role to play, and this role deserves further investigation, both practically and theoretically.

Overall, this thesis aimed to contribute to both the study of democracy and the social role of the arts through an empirical and theoretical study, which explored the potential role of participatory theatre in creating democratic spaces. Finding ways in which citizens can play more active roles within their governance, and understanding spaces in which citizens already engage with politics, have been guiding aims in this thesis. This research explored whether participatory theatre could play a role in citizens' participation in democracy, and what this role may be.

Theoretical research, as well as the analysis of two very different case studies, has led to the following conclusion. There are opportunities and approaches to be learned from participatory theatre in terms of creating democratic spaces.

Particularly with regard to creating alternative approaches to political discourse, which can be playful and emotional, and can enable a more diverse range of voices to be heard, and enable different kinds of listening and exchange amongst citizens. Participatory theatre can also create imaginative spaces which encourage radical and wide-ranging political and social alternatives. However, there are also significant limitations with this approach to creating democratic space. Theatre, as a sector, has major issues with inclusivity, and this is particularly true of more experimental forms such as participatory theatre. It also struggles with political viability – whilst many policy-makers, campaigners and activists are willing to see theatre's potential as a means of awareness raising on particular issues, many struggle to regard it as an approach to policy-making or a form of democratic participation *in its own right*. These are significant, although perhaps not insurmountable, challenges. Overall, this research has shown that there is potential for participatory theatre to create useful and distinctive democratic spaces; and other, more traditional, democratic spaces could learn a great deal from this kind of work.

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Appendix One: Interview Guide

I conducted interviews with three different stakeholder groups in relation to my case studies:
a) audiences, b) actors/production team and c) policy-makers involved in the projects. This document is divided into 3 sections according to these stake holder groups and offers example questions for the respective interviews. My interviews were semi-structured, so these questions represent starting points for the conversations.

A) AUDIENCES

The purpose of my interviews with audiences is to establish the elements of the piece which stayed with them, how they feel about the performance piece 1 month on and whether they feel the piece has affected their actions/political feelings.

1. What do you remember about [NAME OF SHOW]?
2. How do feel about the performance now and is this different from what you felt immediately after you saw the show?
3. Have you followed up on any of the issues explored in the play?
4. Do you feel the show changed the way you think about politics in the UK?

B) ACTORS/PRODUCTION TEAM

The purpose of my interviews with actors/production team is to establish their ambitions/aims for the piece and to hear more about past projects they have done from their own perspective.

1. Tell me more about your role within [NAME OF SHOW].
2. What do you hope your audiences leave the show thinking/feeling?
3. Do you aim for the show to have a political impact and what would that impact be?
4. What do you expect the political impact of the show to be?

C) POLICY-MAKERS

The purpose of these interviews will be to establish the role of policy-makers within this project and what their perspective is on the show's political efficacy.

1. Tell me more about your role within [NAME OF SHOW].
2. How and why did you get involved with this project?
3. Has this project made you see the issues explored by the show differently?
4. Have you followed up on any of the issues explored in the play?
5. What do you think the role of projects like this might be in formal political decision making?

Appendix Two: Coding Schemes

1) Initial coding: reading through all data and coding line by line.
2) Focused coding: the most significant or frequent codes were drawn from the initial coding.
3) Theoretical coding: patterns and frequent codes are related to theoretical framings.

I used NVivo to assist in the coding of my data – repeated words, themes and sentiments were categorised into 'nodes' in phase 1. The most common 'nodes' were then drawn out (using the process below) in phase 2, and these 'nodes' were categorised according to my theoretical framework.

Cathy, by Ali Taylor and Cardboard Citizens

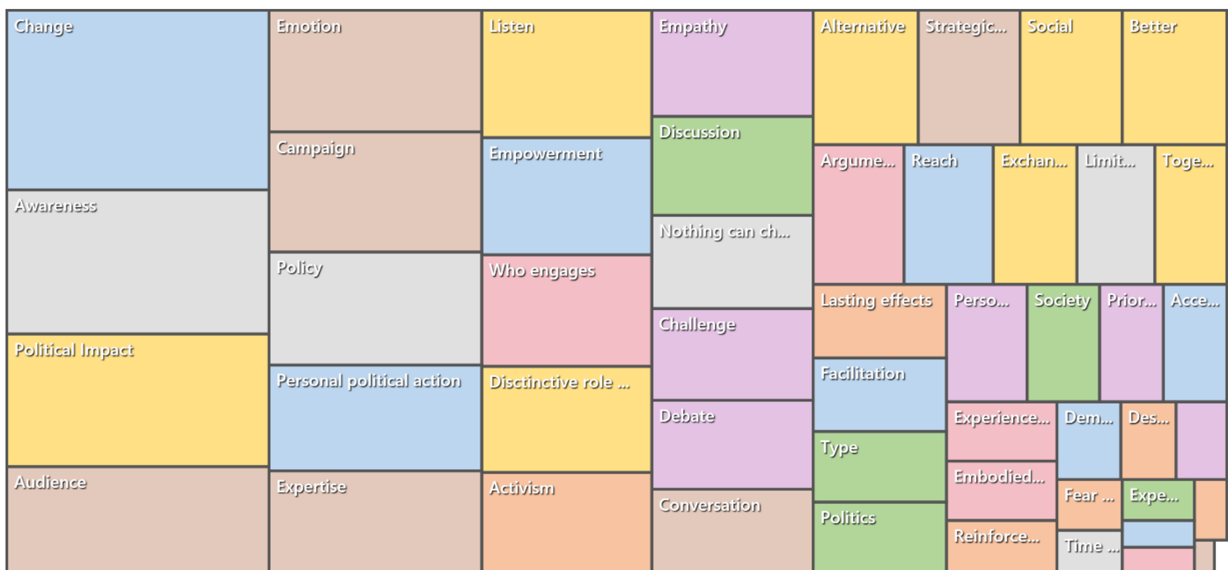

Figure 3: Chart depicting node frequency in all interviews and field notes from *Cathy,* created for this research

We Know Not What We May Be, by METIS

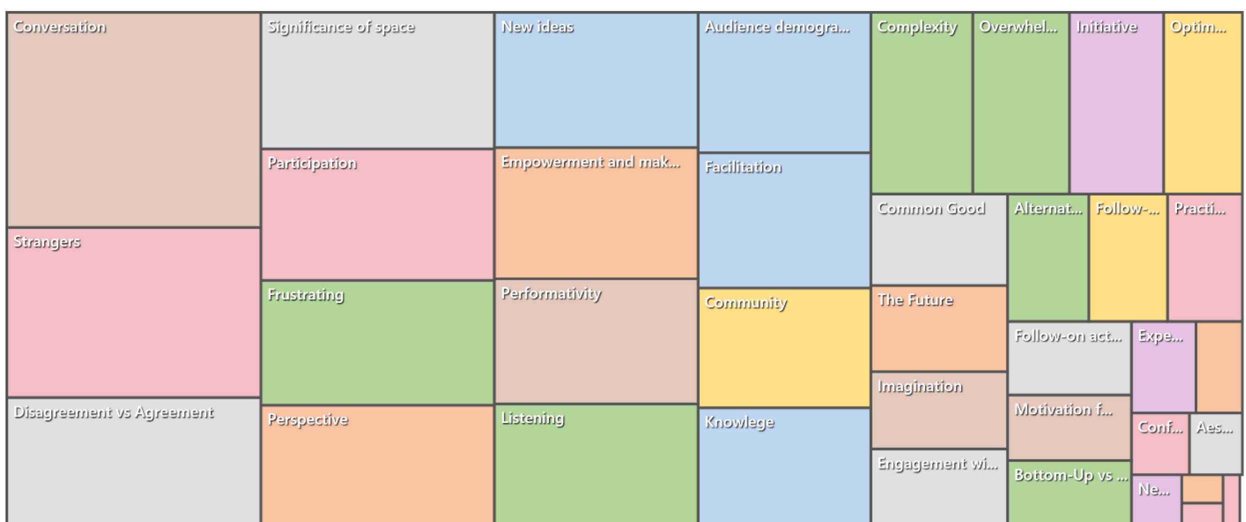

Figure 4: Chart depicting frequency of nodes within interviews and field notes from *We Know Not* by METIS, created for this research

Appendix Three: Ethics Committee Approval

Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee

University of Leeds

14 August 2020

Dear Malaika

Title of study	**The role of participatory and immersive theatre in overcoming neoliberal limitations to democracy: METIS and Cardboard Citizens as democratic spaces.**
Ethics reference	**PVAR 17-062**
Grant reference	**ES/J500215/1**

I am pleased to inform you that the above research application has been reviewed by the Faculty of Arts, Humanities and Cultures Research Ethics Committee and following receipt of your response to the Committee's initial comments, I can confirm a favourable ethical opinion as of the date of this letter. The following documentation was considered:

Document	Version	Date
PVAR 17-062 1. MC University Research Ethics form-signed-signed.pdf	1	25/01/18
PVAR 17-062 1. MC University Research Ethics form.doc	1	25/01/18
PVAR 17-062 6. Approval of Supervisor.png	1	25/01/18

PVAR 17-062 6.Information_Sheet.docx	1	25/01/18
PVAR 17-062 2. Data Management Plan.pdf	1	12/12/17
PVAR 17-062 4. Preliminary Interview Guide.docx	1	12/12/17
PVAR 17-062 3. Participant Consent Form MC.doc	1	12/12/17
PVAR 17-062 5. Fieldwork_Assessment_Form_low_risk___final_protected.doc	1	25/01/18
PVAR 17-062 5. Fieldwork_Assessment_Form_low_risk___pdf.pdf	1	25/01/18

Please notify the committee if you intend to make any amendments to the information in your ethics application as submitted at date of this approval as all changes must receive ethical approval prior to implementation. The amendment form is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAmendment.

Please note: You are expected to keep a record of all your approved documentation and other documents relating to the study, including any risk assessments. This should be kept in your study file, which should be readily available for audit purposes. You will be given a two week notice period if your project is to be audited. There is a checklist listing examples of documents to be kept which is available at http://ris.leeds.ac.uk/EthicsAudits.

We welcome feedback on your experience of the ethical review process and suggestions for improvement. Please email any comments to ResearchEthics@leeds.ac.uk.

Yours sincerely

Jennifer Blaikie

Senior Research Ethics Administrator,

the Secretariat On behalf of Prof

Robert Jones, Chair, AHC FREC

CC: Student’s supervisor(s)