



EXCHANGING ENGAGEMENT: ALTERNATIVE ARTS
ENGAGEMENT IN LATIN AMERICA

Matthew Elliott

Winston Churchill Fellowship 2014



WINSTON
CHURCHILL
MEMORIAL
TRUST

Travel Itinerary

Santiago, Chile: Colectivo Sustento, 11th – 23rd August 2014

Buenos Aires, Argentina: Tercer Cordón, 24th August – 6th September 2014

Montevideo, Uruguay: Perimetral Festival, 7th September – 15th September 2014

Contents

Introduction	2
Colectivo Sustento, Santiago, Chile	5
The tunnel, Modocate tour and agents of change	7
Holistic Approach	11
Conclusion	12
Tercer Cordón, Buenos Aires, Argentina.....	13
Clowning with politics	14
Artist and activism	16
Conclusion	17
Perimetral Festival, Montevideo, Uruguay.....	18
Collaboration with Penelope Glass – Proyecto Minga, Hogar Desafío and Hogar Paulina	18
Teatro Acuarela - Empowerment by Continuity.....	21
Conclusion	22
Recommendations	23
Conclusion	26
Bibliography	27

Introduction

In 1973, Eduardo Galeano, the Uruguayan writer and journalist concluded his seminal book, *Open Veins of Latin America* with the following;

“The Latin American cause is above all a social cause: the rebirth of Latin America must start with the overthrow of its masters, country by country. We are entering times of rebellion and change.”

(Galeano, 1973:261)

Galeano’s statement was written amidst a wave of military coups and dictatorships which encompassed Latin America throughout the latter half of the twentieth century. By 1974, only three countries within Latin America were to be termed as ‘democratic’. The military dictatorships were accompanied by a great human cost. For instance, the National Reorganization Process in Argentina (1976-1983) resulted in 2,300 political assassinations and 20,000-30,000 disappearances (Kirby, 2003:77; Haerpfer, Bernhagen, Inglehart & Welzel, 2009:63).

As Galeano stated, the oppression of populations and the unfortunate loss of lives throughout Latin America led to ‘times of rebellion and change’. Artists, activists and the wider community sought to challenge and resist autocratic regimes to seek alternative ways of upholding their democratic and human rights. These methods and practice have transcended the democratisation of the continent in the 1980’s and 1990’s. The desire to advocate change through the arts has continued to be radical and proposes an alternative way of being to communities in Latin America. How can this practice be transposed to benefit the personal and social development of young people in the UK? This is the premise upon which the fellowship is based.

For the past 6 years, I have been training and working as a community theatre practitioner. This has involved working with young people in a range of communities and settings based in the North West of England including prisons, education settings and services for refugee and asylum seekers. It was during my undergraduate study that I participated in a workshop led by Penelope Glass from Colectivo Sustento, Chile. This led to a 6 week work placement in 2009 and the attendance at ENTEPOLA theatre festival in 2011. This generated my interest in the Latin American approach to creating theatre for social change.

At present, I am the youth theatre director at Collective Encounters (<http://collective-encounters.org.uk/>), a theatre for social change company based in Liverpool. The primary aim of the work is to tackle the 'local, national and international concerns of our time'. The role consists of developing high quality performances with a core group of young people as well as delivering outreach programmes with a range of marginalised young people including young carers, the homeless community and looked after children. All of these projects have the aim of contributing to social change whether it is on an individual, civic or political level.

My experience of working with young people and my brief encounters with Latin American arts practice led to a need to intertwine these practices and develop a theatre for social change practice which engages the political and social rights of young people in the UK. The need led to six weeks being spent in the southern cone of South America observing a range of practices, these are as follows:

- Colectivo Sustento, Santiago, Chile.
- Tercer Cordón, Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Perimetral Festival, Montevideo, Uruguay.

This shaped the aims for the fellowship:

- Observe and participate in Latin American arts engagement practice; play an active role within the existing programme and delivery of Colectivo Sustento (CS) and Tercer Cordón (TC) practice.
- Conduct robust and ethical research into the practice of CS and TC; facilitate several means of documenting and recording the efficacy of theatre for social change practice.
- Produce a quality practice framework for youth arts engagement; accumulate all knowledge and data from the project and integrate it with existing Collective Encounters practice.
- Apply the framework to existing Collective Encounters provision; ensure that the practice is adapted and validated to current core and outreach groups.
- Disseminate the framework via established networks and organisations locally, regionally and nationally.

The report will follow a chronological order but will highlight and discuss three recurring themes of the fellowship: continuity, sustainability and activism. In all three countries, these themes acted as a foundation to each company's practice and demonstrated an exciting and innovating way of engaging young people in the arts. The three components all have differences in their application in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay. It is the differences that formulate the recommendations and framework.

The organisations, communities and people I met during the fellowship have been an inspiration to my practice in the UK. Questions were answered but more questions emerged, these are questions I welcome. How can theatre ethically engage young people in the social and political decisions that shape their society? I envisage the fellowship as the beginning of an answer, an answer that will continue to fluctuate, change and transform for a long period of time. The form will change but the aim will be consistent: the development of democratic rights for young people by young people; a society where young people are not 'known and acted upon' but are 'those who know and act' (Freire, 1996:18).

Colectivo Sustento, Santiago, Chile



Huerta Sustento; Sustenance garden. Colectivo Sustento space, Santiago, Chile.

As I departed from Chile, I wrote the following in a blog about the practice of Colectivo Sustento: -

In the back garden of a home in Santiago, there is a resistance happening: resistance to a system that perpetuates reoffending, advocates food dependency and produces illusions of freedom.

To resist is an action which can encompass a myriad of guises, whether it be lobbying councillors, taking to the streets in protest or expressing dissent in public forums. It was apparent that a resistance was happening but in unique and innovative ways that empowers groups who would never be deemed to become empowered and finding autonomy in a system that is rooted so deeply in to the pores of Chilean society: neoliberalism.

Colectivo Sustento (CS) was established in 2012 and developed out of long term community theatre projects under the former name of Teatro Pasmí. CS states their beliefs as follows:

To create, to create together, to create from the earth. Colectivo Sustento is dedicated to community theatre and arts, and we are committed to social justice through our work with theatre, writing and photography. We believe that together we can imagine and create a more human and healthy way of living and relating.

(Colectivo Sustento, 2014)

This belief is delivered via two avenues;

- 1) Theatre. Workshops take place in Colina 1 prison and at the CS space. Colina 1 prison has two long standing theatre groups, Fenix & Ilusiones. These groups have been functioning since 2002 and develop performances for a range of audiences including fellow prisoners, young offenders and the general public. The theatre work at the CS space consists of ex-members of Fenix & Ilusiones and theatre practitioners/activists.
- 2) Community garden. 'Take control of what you eat', is the basic premise behind the community garden but it also plays a vital role in sustaining elements of CS. The garden is a centre for training those who are interested in food autonomy and alternative methods of sustainability.

Both avenues rely on continuity as a means to sustain the collective's autonomy.

Historically, CS does not directly work with young people. However, the premiere of *Moderate* in 2013 enabled a long term ambition to be fulfilled; members of Fenix & Ilusiones performing to young people who are in custody or at risk of offending.

The tunnel, Modecate tour and agents of change

Penelope Glass of CS, explains the origins of the idea: -

“We devised this idea, called the tunnel and the tunnel was going to receive people who had been released and work with them for a certain amount of time with theatre, but also psychological, social work and legal support to be able to get over the transition time upon release, which is about 18 months.”

(Glass, 2014)

The idea of the tunnel was proposed by members of the Fenix & Illusiones group when the first member of the group was due to be released in 2007. The idea was delayed due to lack of financial support but was re-established when CS was formed with the identification that for the work to have social impact, the work in the prison needs to be continued when members are released (Glass, 2014).

A part of this idea was to work with young people; this was developed upon an experience in 2005 where members of Fenix & Illusiones performed at a school. The effect of serving prisoners performing in front of young people was tremendous on a range of levels and led to the development of the Modecate tour. Modecate deals with the theme of social control ‘through the theatrical metaphor of madness’ (Colectivo Sustento, 2014). The performance toured to three youth offender institutions with seven performances of Modecate. The performance was always accompanied with a post-show workshop and discussion.

As I arrived in Chile, I was lucky enough to view Modecate on its final performance that was based in Colina 1 prison, where the groups are based. Unfortunately, I missed the tour but the final performance was attended by a range of officials from the prison and juvenile justice service as well as families and friends of the group. The performance finished with a round circle discussion to which family members and officials praised the efficacy of the tour and what it had achieved with young people.

How does this relate to engaging marginalised young people in the UK? And, what was achieved? In Chile there is a 'school to prison pipeline' culture. Young people who grow up in some of the most deprived areas of Santiago have limited opportunities; unfortunately prison appears most credible in certain scenarios.

Chile has the most unequal income distribution within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and there is a severe income imbalance with only 1/5th of the population controlling over half of the country's wealth (OECD, 2012; World Bank, 2012). Inequality has been proven to have negative effects on a range of sectors including health and education. For example, the more unequal a country is there will be a worse educational attainment (Wilkinson & Pickett, 2009:11/105).

In the UK, the story isn't too dissimilar. Young people in the UK youth justice system are predominantly from poor and severely disadvantaged families whom have a history of abuse or bereavement and 50% have been in local authority care at some stage of their lives (Barnardos, 2014). The UK has a GINI coefficient (measurement of inequality) of 0.34, one of the highest in the developing world compared to countries like Denmark with 0.25 (Equality Trust, 2014).

Moderate aimed to break the pipeline and challenge such inequalities; this was achieved by offering a space of reflection. Young people stated a range of positive and reflective responses such as 'I identified, everything you said was real and moving, your message got to me' and "we realised we can do much more than what we imagine" (Colectivo Sustento, 2014). But, how was this achieved?

The most unique aspect of this work is that the prisoners themselves travel (under heavy escort and handcuff) and perform to the young people. It is something that would never be able to happen in the UK. Individuals from a closed prison travelling to a youth offender institution to perform a play about social control would not only seem absurd but pretty ludicrous. For CS, it is a rule and not an exception. For years, Fenix and Illusiones have been able to travel outside of the prison to perform to audiences as large as 3000 people at international festivals.

As imagined, the external performances aren't as smooth as desired and require extensive conversations with authorities. But, it offers something to the prisoners and its audiences, in this case young people. It offers agency, an agency to change society.

The agency that Fenix and Illusiones have developed through collective critical reflection enables them to participate in changing the world from the confines of the most oppressive institutions in the world, the epitome of irony. As Glass (2014) states: 'Where do we find that agency? In a group, in a collective'.

The agency derives from their experiences of the criminal justice system, as Gabriel Jimenez, former member of Fenix and Illusiones and current member of CS states: -

"I think that the results we have seen with the kids in the different centres where we have been, have given us tremendous satisfaction. We are very happy, particularly since the idea seemed so absurd to many people that people from a prison would go to a juvenile prison to give positive advice!! ...it's strange."

(Jimenez , 2014)

As Brazilian pedagogue Paulo Freire (1921-1997) states, '...human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world' (Freire, 1996:106/7). He continued by stating that change cannot be achieved by the sole means of verbalism or activism but the merging of practice and theory: action and reflection: praxis.

The work of CS reflects and openly advocates this approach with artists, participants and audiences. The tour and the development of work with young people moved the action and reflection beyond Fenix and Illusiones and towards others, beyond the self. A result of critical collective reflection as stated previously.

However, the work of Paulo Freire isn't rare or unique to the UK. It is a key text within community theatre study as well as the education sector, and made better known by the theatrical writings and practices of Augusto Boal.

So, what makes this work an alternative to popular discourse regarding Paulo Freire and the use of critical reflection within the theatrical process? From my observation, I would like to suggest that this was a result of continuity.

Fenix & Ilusiones have run consistently since 2002, with original members continuing to work with CS upon release via the notion of the tunnel. As opposed to the continuity of a project, it is the continuity of a group. The group doesn't become an exclusive entity but grows and develops with old and new members. It is the time that has been able to develop the unique nature of the relationship between theatre, participant and in this case, the prison. Time has been the enabler for action and reflection to take place.

How to sustain the continuity? In reference to when Fenix & Ilusiones began, Glass states:

“We made a commitment to the guys, we talked about it and said to them, ‘we will come with or without funding’, when we made that commitment, we said ‘we’re really making this commitment’, we’re going to see how far we can go without having to rely on funding.”

(Glass, 2014)

For continuity to take place there was commitment, a commitment to the work which required the bare minimum of access, space and people. Community theatre is not a recognised form in Chile, the arts council equivalent, Fondart, rarely recognise the value of community theatre projects. CS alongside a lot of projects I witnessed debunked the idea of, no funding then no project. Alternatives are developed.

With arts funding in the UK being dramatically reduced in recent years, real-term cuts of £457m since 2010 (Arts Council England, 2014), to what extent do UK artists need to be looking at alternative methods of sustaining their practice? With continued reductions, alternative ways of financing activity need to be addressed if any work is to continue. There are a range of methods available including crowdfunding, philanthropic giving and sponsorship. However, the ethics and reliability of such methods can be dubious and unpredictable.

Holistic Approach

During an interview, Glass (2014) stated that 'theatre is not the be all and end all for social change but it is an excellent tool'. CS identified that strength and possibilities of change occur via a multitude of approaches. Theatre is strengthened by other activities that also challenge and resist. Alternative approaches offer a means of sustainability.

The key example of this is the community garden. CS identify that the system in which they resist penetrates beyond the prison wall and manipulates basic human needs. In this case: food. With Gabriel trained in organic agriculture for two years by a local farm, the garden produces an array of food from grandiose watermelons in the summer to beautiful spinach in the winter. The food covers basic needs of the collective, it does not solve all funding needs. But, it is ethical, the collective have control of what they eat. The focus is on the creation rather than the production, as group member Carolina states the need for this work:

“Because there's a dynamic of breaking the dominant logic that has to do with individualism and productivity in economic terms”

(Morales & Vera, 2014)

This way of working is currently being extended to develop theatre and gardening programmes in youth offender institutes. At first, it appears that this way of working is a reaction to the culture of arts funding and working in Chile. Inevitably, this plays its role within defining ways of sustaining the collective but CS identify that to create change, theatre needs to be more than the act of theatre. The principle of resistance cannot be isolated to the workshop room but needs to permeate beyond.

Conclusion

Abandon the funders and start a vegetable garden? There are elements of practice that would be deemed unsuitable or potentially unstable for the UK. But, it is the alternative and radical nature of CS that has opened up a lot of questions for my practice in the UK. When working with project partners and organisations, when does the collaboration end? And, what are the methods if theatre is not the means of engaging marginalised young people?

The tacit and autonomous nature of CS enables the radical to happen. A range of reforms would need to take place within the UK to achieve certain amounts of autonomy. For example, the rigidity of funding applications would need to be assessed as a means to open up alternative and more collaborative ways of engaging young people. The autonomous nature of CS broadened the possibilities of engaging marginalised young people.

Time, commitment and agency have enabled CS to discover their work; all three of these elements are not going to appear overnight. It has been the circular motion of action and reflection that has discovered the cracks, openings and livelihood of these concepts. It has inspired a reflection to find time when there may appear to be none, commit from the basis of a human (not economic) need and support the agency of those who may have never been deemed possible to have agency. For more information on CS, please visit - <http://colectivosustento.org/>



Gabriel Jiminez & Francisco (Pancho) Morales, Juan Rodriguez rehearsal, CS space.

Tercer Cordon, Buenos Aires, Argentina



Tercer Cordon performing '¿quien es el jefe ahora?' – 'Who is the boss now?', Moreno, Buenos Aires.

Technique can be viewed as restrictive or sometimes inaccessible when engaging community groups, sometimes steeped in discipline, the option of a dialogical relationship appears unfeasible. Tercer Cordon (TC) understands and seeks to change this. The technique is intertwined with pedagogy.

Clown + critical pedagogy = Tercer Cordon

Formed in 2000 by Fredy Perusso and Mariela Campanoni. TC was established amongst the delivery of street theatre performances of 'Juan Moreira' (popular Argentine folk hero) alongside trade unions leading up to the December 2001 uprising. Two became three when Lara Carro joined in 2005. TC runs a range of community groups from their space 'El Churqui' including a range of groups for young people, emerging artists and professionals. As well as groups there are performances, either in the street or in 'unconventional' theatre spaces. This all accumulates in the annual street theatre festival organised by TC – Octubre Callejero.

My time with TC included three separate performances, weekly workshops with four participatory groups and preparation for Octubre Callejero. A busy schedule was in place.

Clowning with politics

In relation to clown and politics, Davison states:

“We can see that clowning in the realm of politics holds an ambiguous position, at once critic, police, hero, enemy, representative of the people and a threat to the social order. Having seen such slippery behaviour already in other fields of clown endeavour, this should come as no surprise. The clown is apt to be assimilated into the needs of the moment, yet never completely so, it seems.”

(Davison, 2013:256)

The ambiguity of the clown's position in relation to politics enables a level of flexibility and autonomy. TC utilise this position as a means of artistic and political engagement for young people, both as audience members and participants.

An example of this is the show - '¿quien es el jefe ahora?' – 'Who is the boss now?'. The show was performed in parks and in the street. The show with traditional clown aesthetic; red nose, slapstick gesture and minimal words interrogated the theme of power. What does it mean to have power? Who has power? And, can power be shared?

The question for me was how to transpose the complexities and contradictions of power to an audience of 8-12 year olds? Clowning offered an access in to these issues with laughter and fun. Igniting the age old argument between education and entertainment, do we engage beyond our laughter? TC demonstrated that the fun of clowning was the access point of engagement for young audiences; opening a space to discuss complexities of power.

In contemporary applied theatre discourse, there is a debate between the emphases on effect as opposed to affect. Thompson (2009:6) argues that applied theatre is 'limited' as it merely focuses upon 'identifiable social outcomes' and disengages the 'radical potential' for communities to participate in aesthetically beautiful articles and entities.

In regards to TC, this is where a contradiction is met similar to CS. The lack of consistent funding can place companies under pressure but inevitably opens up a range of possibilities, no 'identifiable social outcomes' to be conforming to. To the advantage of TC, performances such as '¿quien es el jefe ahora?' engages the 'radical potential' for audience members to participate in the aesthetics and technique of clowning; a form of theatre that is unique in position and style whilst interrogating the economic and social contradictions of the world in which we live: the process of conscientisation (Freire, 1996:17).

Clowning and politics isn't an alien concept to the UK. Groups such as the Clandestine Insurgent Rebel Clown Army (CIRCA) have been creating exciting and innovative ways to challenge social issues for over 10 years. But how does this work when engaging participants as opposed to audience members? Can clowning technique maintain its radical potential when transferred from performance to workshop space? Yes, the technique when combined with dialogical facilitation enabled a continuity of engagement from the performance to the workshop.

TC partnered their performances with a participatory programme. Weekly workshops at the El Churqui, the only theatre/workshop space in Moreno, a small province north of central Buenos Aires. On a Tuesday and Wednesday evening, the children/young people's groups would come together to play theatre games, exercises and create group devised work, usually based on a zombie apocalypse. TC member Lara stated the premise behind the workshops: -

“There's not a sense of us being knowledge providers to the students, in the case of the workshops for example, but rather we work from what they have with the idea of creating knowledge together.”

(Tercer Cordon, 2014)

There were no vast differences in games or exercises from the UK but the discipline and technique of clowning was very prevalent. The level to which the games and exercises were dealt with by the participants was inspiring. For example, towards the end of a session the 9-12 yr old group were left to devise a few short scenes with no assistance from the facilitator, a short set of scenes equipped with dialogue and evident stagecraft were then delivered. The non-intervening nature of the facilitators combined with the independence of the group was motivating. It demonstrated the potential of an authentic dialogical relationship between facilitator and participant.

From observations and conversations with TC, amongst other variables there appeared to be two themes at work. a) The combination of aesthetic with pedagogy. b) Continuity, two themes that appear to be inextricably linked. Underlying the discipline and playful nature of the clowning technique was the ethics of dialogue; over time this appears to have created a group dynamic that identifies the needs of each other as well as the group, resolving conflict and enabling constructive debate. In regards to theatre programmes within a developing context, Plastow states: -

“And we should be aware of programmes that are instrumentalist, seeking to tell people what to do rather than engaging in dialogue from the starting point of the community rather than the funder.”

(Plastow, 2014:116)

The starting point for TC is the dialogue with its groups as Lara stated, distancing itself from the possibilities of instrumentalism.

However, is this led by choice or circumstance? Funded programmes are limited but if a funding relationship is formed would the dialogue recede? Regarding Octubre Callejero, Mariella recalled there were 'political differences' about the work between funders and TC, so they continued independently (Tercer Cordon, 2014). The work wouldn't be hindered by the agendas of those who are in a position of financial superiority.

Continuity is the running theme of both Chile and Argentina. Both CS and TC demonstrate the benefits for their participants groups by maintaining a continuous relationship. For TC, the development of the relationship between aesthetic and pedagogy relied on the continuity that TC advocate.

In relation to my own practice, the idea of style and aesthetic has raised a lot of questions. If there are ethics underlying certain aesthetics does it imply that any style could be possible to engage young people dialogically? And, does this prevent the practice from becoming dogmatic? There are beliefs that certain forms of applied theatre are based around the aesthetics of credited practitioners such as Brecht or Boal, and not to discredit these approaches, TC has provoked thought around more pluralist aesthetics within the applied theatre discourse.

Artist and activism

Theatre and change are two words that have a longstanding, and some would say, an inseparable relationship. Theatre can create change on a multitude of levels but context plays a very large role within that belief. As Snyder-Young identifies:

“Most artists are aware that theatre projects cannot, generally, do things like stop wars, start revolutions, prevent the rise of regimes, stop the proliferation of nuclear arms, or put an end to global warming.”

(Snyder-Young, 2014:132)

Theatre has advantages and limitations as all forms of political activism do. The benefit to activism being effective is to know when to utilise it; identifying 'whether theatre is the intervention their circumstances and goals require' (Snyder-Young, 2014:139).

TC perform at a range of political events with the understanding that theatre cannot be the solution to the issue but envisage it as a wider and accessible medium for assisting the wider change and activities. In the months prior to my stay with TC, Argentina defaulted on their debt for the second time in 13 years (BBC news, 2014). Alongside other artists, activists and speakers, TC performed a short sketch with their acclaimed style of punk clown, detailing a range of views on the recent default and provoking a line of thought – 'Let's build a punk nation'. Theatre was one of the many mediums on offer at the event; as opposed to being separated they were collaborative; survival by the creation of relationships with others who share the same ideas (Tercer Cordon, 2014).

TC member Fredy elaborates on the unfeasible separation of theatre from social injustices:

“My concept of theatre cannot be separated from my concept about life in general, where I see that there is a system of relationships based on injustice and where the ambition is for the individual to win out over others. So I think it is important to revert this. And our theatre has to do with that, to try to generate other forms of social relationships where we can connect to each other in a more equitable way, in a more fraternal way.”

(Tercer Cordon, 2014)

Conclusion

Both Chile and Argentina demonstrated a very passionate attitude for making theatre, a passion that was inspirational, a passion that could motivate any theatre maker to overcome whatever obstacle is thrown on to the tracks in front of them.

However, much of my reflection has to decipher what can be transposed to UK culture and what is possible to adapt. TC validated that technique and aesthetic can have prominence within applied theatre discourse. Could this be adapted to training and practice within the UK? All practice is applicable but as Ganguly (2010:134) argues; the ‘progression of thought’ in theatre practice is halted when it becomes limited by dogma. There are vast opportunities for the development of certain styles in the UK as a means to progress theatre with young people but practitioners must maintain cautious that dialogue can become dogma.

Also, the emphasis on collaboration with alternative groups generated ideas as to ‘who we aren’t working with?’. Community theatre relies on a range of partnerships but TC demonstrated that alternative collaborators can be found. For more information, please see: - www.facebook.com/tercer.teatro



Rehearsal of punk clown sketch, El Churqui space, Moreno, Buenos Aires

Perimetral Festival, Montevideo, Uruguay



Theatre workshop with children from Hogar Paulina, Ciudad de la costa, Uruguay

Perimetral festival takes place over two separate areas surrounding Montevideo: Las Piedras and Ciudad de la Costa and is jointly organised by Teatro Acuarela and Teatro La Sala. The festival lasted for eight days and consisted of performances, workshops and talks by a range of practitioners from Latin America. 3-4 performances per day, each performance was held in non-traditional theatre spaces, transforming community centres, school halls and bars. The chapter will focus on two elements: - 1) collaboration with Penelope Glass on delivering a set of workshops with three different groups of young people. 2) The work of Teatro Acuarela and the young actors group.

Collaboration with Penelope Glass – Proyecto Minga, Hogar Desafio and Hogar Paulina

The workshops were organised by the festival organisers as part of the overall programme. The workshops took place in a range of different contexts as a means to exchange practice and experience between community organisations, arts practitioners and the young people they work with. It was arranged that myself and Penelope Glass of Colectivo Sustento would co-deliver workshops. The workshops consisted of an exchange of exercises and discussions about practice in Uruguay, Chile and the UK. The nature and purpose of the workshops and exercises were led by the young people.

Proyecta Minga – Forgetting the Signposts

A Christian based organisation in Las Piedras. Proyecta Minga was established as a means to address the needs of street children within the local area. The organisation believed in a holistic approach to working with young people that offered support in everything from education to the basic human needs of sanitation and food. Proyecta Minga is under one roof and co-ordinated by a dedicated team of staff and volunteers who are trained as teachers, youth or social workers. The culture of 'signposting' was non-evident, proyecta minga acted as a one-stop shop for support.

The workshop began with a round circle of questions, discussions and music. Before we developed to practical work, there was a showing of a video produced by CS which included a short performance and talk by CS member Gabriel Jiminez. The talk discussed Gabriel's experience of creating theatre in prison, the effects of criminality and principles of choice that we encounter in our lives. The room became silent as the video finished. Gabriel from CS demonstrated that agency can transcend country borders. Glass (2013:27) highlights the importance and unique nature of these moments where groups who may not be deemed as citizens advocate an agency beyond the conventional means of civic participation.

The mutual respect that was established prior to the film was reinforced by Gabriel's words. The video was a unique and powerful moment to witness and one that was repeated in the Hogar Desafio, the efficacy of agency from those who aren't deemed to have agency. The workshop then ensued, as not to impose an agenda we proposed an exchange of exercises as we were informed that members of the group were equipped with exercises and games. A range of exercises were played, working with image theatre and a range of focus games.

The group was very diverse with a range of ages and abilities, there was no attention paid to this, older members of the group assumed mentoring positions to young members. The project has been running continuously for a number of years and was owned by the young people, continuity once more. It was an authentic empowerment of young people who organised the building from the cooking to cleaning. It was inspiring to see young people from a range of ages and most probably from chaotic lives, find a way of working collectively and creating a change within their own lives as well as others.

The workshop finished with a sharing of celebrations about Proyecta Minga. The evening continued with games of basketball, table tennis and a communal meal. Theatre was important for these young people but the holistic nature of the organisation reinforced that theatre is not an element to be had in isolation but in association with a range of other happenings that provide a sense of stability within a chaotic and unstable society.

Hogar Desafio- On the Margins

Translated to English, Hogar Desafio means 'challenge home'. It is a secure childrens unit in Montevideo. However, the institution resembled a prison with locked doors and a police guard on the front door. The United Nations commissioned a report in 2009 into alleged report of torture and ill treatment on prisoners. The report found concern with the alleged ill treatment and beating of young people as a form of punishment. There was also concern as to the preferred use of imprisonment as opposed to alternative punitive measures (United Nations, 2009).

We visited the Hogar Desafio twice during the festival. The first time to deliver a short workshop and the second to watch a short performance the boys had created. Having worked in prisons in the UK and Chile, the Hogar Desafio was a unique environment for the making of theatre. The workshops were short and with two separate groups; one with experience of drama and one with no prior experience. The workshops consisted of a range of exercises according to what the group enjoyed; there was minimal resistance, contrary to stereotypes of participants within a judicial setting.

Uruguay is unique and incredibly innovative with the legalisation of Marijuana, abortion and same sex marriage. University education is free and the arts are compulsory from primary education with the option of an arts education pathway in high school. Outgoing President Mujica has been questioned as the 'world's most radical President' (The Guardian, 2014). But, institutions such as the Hogar Desafio appear to have been left behind in the midst of the vast social reforms. What does this mean for the artist working with young people in these environments? Accept this notion? Turn a blind eye?

Hooks (1990:341) states that 'margins' open a space of resistance where communities create and 'imagine alternatives'. The drama group at the Hogar Desafio was working within this margin, between the punitive regime and the caged play areas there was an element of resistance and autonomy. The work provoked thinking regarding the antagonism between micro and macro change. For the young people who have become wound up in forgotten reforms, theatre appeared to be a margin to imagine alternatives. This was reinforced by the performance in the second workshop that utilised the traditions of Greek mythology to discuss and debate the young people's self-efficacy.

The Hogar Desafio emphasised the power of theatre on the margins as a means of resistance. However, the institution that oppresses the young people it inhabits still continues to exist and does need to change. Maybe the change of the system does not come from the grand reform or the overthrow but the meeting of numerous margins: the 'multiplicity of interstitial movements' (Holloway, 2010:11).

Hogar Paulina – Power in Playing

The last of the workshops was given to a group of young girls from a children's residential unit in Ciudad de la Costa. The workshop was opened up to other artists at the festival, resulting in an 'international workshop' with practitioners from Argentina, Brazil, UK and Australia delivering exercises with the group. A distinctive experience where there was no theme or concept for the workshop but just an idea to play games, eat together and generally have a fun time. It underlined an idea: the power of playing.

In reference to children's games, to which the majority of our games stemmed from, Barker states: -

“Children's games are a readily accessible, and seemingly acceptable, framework for releasing physical and emotional energy. Pressure is released, and the human being is to some extent made free, in a framework which is not susceptible to social criticism.”

(Barker, 1977:64)

The ability to play and eat without the overhanging need to create a product or be limited to the means of theatre practice produced a vivid experience for all involved. The playing created a powerful space for participants to be 'free' and release their emotional and physical energies, a workshop focused on affect as opposed to effect, in reference to Thompson's statement (see page 14). The irony is that this conversation wasn't held before the workshop and neither was there an acknowledgement of the power in playing. Maybe that's where its radical nature lies? No imposition, no agendas at hand to be fulfilled by participant or facilitator.

The three workshops were dissimilar for a multitude of reasons: circumstance, environment, time, the list is boundless. The practices exhibited are not at all examples to be followed religiously; each had their own contradictions and complications. However, each place had their own distinct character and opened up a wealth of questions and examples to aspire to. There was a link between the three places: empowerment. By different means, whether it is playing, exchanging or performing, there was a critical consciousness in development, a desire to make sense of their world.

Teatro Acuarela - Empowerment by Continuity

The second part of the festival was organised by Teatro Acuarela, more specifically, their young actors group. Organisation, planning, transport and any other logistical means were met by the young people of Teatro Acuarela. There was no façade or the young people carrying out the orders of an adult, every initiative and preparation was led by the young people. What was the process? How did 15 young people aged 18-20 arrive at the position of organising a festival for international artists?

Boon & Plastow (2004:7) argue that empowerment entails more than the 'amelioration of oppression and poverty' but the 'liberation of the mind and spirit.' Inevitably this entails the ability for participants to become 'conscious beings' and having the agency to choose 'how their lives will be lived'. From conversations with group members, the group has been working together for numerous years, some of them since the ages of nine and eleven. Teatro Acuarela demonstrated that the form of empowerment artists may desire for their participants has to be planned with the realities of time and maintain continuity.

The investment of time by artistic director Fernando Palle and other members of Teatro Acuarela have made such empowerment possible. This has enabled the young people to adopt a position of empowering others, a handover of responsibilities to the group that created autonomy to manage their own development. Ultimately, this led to the young people organising the Perimetral festival. A way of working that was core to the work of CS. Fernando states: -

"I said to them that they had reached the limit with me, that I didn't have much more to teach them. I had taught them all I could teach them. And they had taught me heaps. Heaps, I have learnt heaps with them. And now it was the time to start functioning as a theatre group, with a certain level of autonomy. And that's how they came to create the Acuarela Theatre Group."

(Palle, 2014)

The group of young actors closed the festival with a premiere of their latest performance. A 45 minute piece delving in and out of different lives that are oppressed by a number of means, all held together by skilled ensemble physical theatre work. The work was of a high quality. The debate between high quality product and community theatre process is ongoing and there are examples of delivering high quality practice in the UK. Teatro Acuarela's quality of work and skill has been developed over a long period of time. Is time the significant function to create high quality work? The young actors group of Teatro Acuarela displayed the possibilities that continuity can offer in regards to creating performance and empowering young people. Continuity is not exclusive to Latin American practice but was predominantly the rule as opposed to the exception.

Conclusion

Uruguay offered the practical implementation of the fellowships findings. It also offered an insight to a range of institutions that work with and for young people, these were both enlightening as well as concerning. It demonstrated an alternative way of organisations working with arts organisations or in some cases, embedding the arts in to everyday provision for young people. Teatro Acuarela is a proven example of the benefits to maintaining the arts as part of a young person's personal

and social development. For more information on Teatro Acuarela, please visit - <http://escueladeteatroacuarela.jimdo.com/>

Recommendations

The hardest part of creating the following set of recommendations has been being able to identify what would be culturally transferable and could be practically implemented in the UK. Cultural, historical and socio-economic factors have a vital role in the creation and implementation of practice, these recommendations seek to offer a proposal to incorporate the radical and innovative style of Latin American practice within the UK's applied theatre sector.

The report is aimed to engage a wide range of organisations from grassroots organisations to policy makers. The findings seek to provoke debate amongst youth arts organisations, community theatre students and youth work practitioners. The report will be accompanied by a practical workshop that seeks to discuss the applicability of the recommendations within the UK youth sector.

Below are five recommendations for arts organisations working with young people in order to create social change: -

1. Maintain a continuity of practice for young people.

The cornerstone of all three practices was continuity. The benefits from providing a continuous provision for young people were illustrious. Continuity does exist within UK practice but there were distinct differences in the examples. There was a strong focus on the continuity of a group as opposed to the general project, the focus and continuity on a single group enabled plausible achievements. It demonstrated the relationship between a good process and a good product, two elements that were made possible by time. For example, would the work of Teatro Acuarela have been possible within a shorter time frame? Would a group of 15 young people have been able to organise an international festival within a short period of time? I have my doubts as to the work being possible under any other time span than that was already in place. Finally, there is a danger to reinforcing certain elements of inconsistency and 'parachute project' behaviour when working within the community, for working with marginalised young people; it is a style that should be avoided at all costs. Theatre and the arts should be a form of liberation from certain systems and cultures, not to become one of them.

2. Explore alternative methods of self-sustaining theatre for young people.

Relating to the recommendation above, how do we sustain a practice amidst vast funding cuts for the arts as well as local authorities? Also, how do we secure financial support that is ethical? Aside from the awe inspiring passion and the 'just do it' attitude of the three companies, there was an insight to funding arts programmes for young people that is outside of conventional state or foundation/charitable trust funding. CS and the notion of 'auto-gestion' (self-sustainability) led the example of alternative ways of sustaining work for young people. The community garden was an example of maintaining autonomy of work as well as sustaining the delivery of practice. On a basic level, when the money runs out does the practice end? And if so, is this ethical when engaging marginalised young people in theatre for social change practice? The fellowship demonstrated a need to explore alternative methods of sustaining the work in order to provide the benefits of continuity as previously discussed. The fellowship evidenced that initiatives of community gardens and the exchange of services as opposed to the exchange of money can be possible.

3. Create collaborations with activists and social movements for young people.

The arts alone do not have the potential to shift paradigms or create wider societal change, nor do a lot of other forms or advocates of social change. This shouldn't result in the defeatist question of 'what can we do then?' but 'who can we work with?'. All three examples identified the wider issue of their work and collaborated with a range of none-arts based organisations from psychologists to activists. TC was pivotal in demonstrating this with their punk clown performance and the 'creation of ideas' with those that shares the same idea, not necessarily the same art form.

Collaborations are many and common between arts organisations in the UK and are the location of innovative theatre work. The fellowship provoked a question of whether a collaboration that is with activist or social movements could produce innovative social change for young people.

4. Develop a holistic arts provision that includes additional methods of support for young people.

Proyecta Minga exhibited a holistic approach to working with young people, the possibilities and willingness to support extremely marginalised young people in a range of subjects proved invaluable. The multitude of difficulties that certain young people encounter could not be dealt with by a singular form or approach. The project coordinators understood that the suggestion of another service could be potentially impractical to the needs of the young person. As opposed to signposting there was a member of staff who would be

able to support a young person with their needs immediately. The incorporation of alternative support within an arts provision for young people could enable a safer and successful engagement for young people in the arts. As stated, there is a multitude of issues that could be encountered and enabling support for all issues would become completely impractical. However, the identification of the support that is needed and implementing this within an arts provision could enable young people to gain a wider benefit from participating in the arts.

5. Ensure young people can utilise their agency for the benefit of other young people.

CS and Teatro Acuarela demonstrated the power of agency for young people and community groups. The means of continuity and critical reflection enabled groups to envisage and create a change within their own lives and society. CS's work with serving and ex-prisoners identified the ability to transcend personal change and engage others in change, the development of personal change to social change. This could be seen similarly with Teatro Acuarela's young actors delivering workshops for other young people, utilising their personal agency for a wider societal change. The development of agency from the self to others was motivating. Arts provision should aim to include the development of young people's agency for wider societal change; enabling them to become empowered and take full ownership of the theatre they create and the change they envisage.



Puppets in Transit, Political Performance for 'Marcha del Silencio', Santiago, Chile.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the fellowship has proven that there are a range of alternatives for engaging young people in the arts, sustaining practice and enabling creative political debate. Chile, Argentina and Uruguay all have different ways of working but themes of continuity, sustainability and activism were evident and very strong. The report has highlighted these themes as important learning points for the work in the UK. There are issues and struggles within the work, the lack of recognition by various bodies and financial vulnerability are a challenge for the work in Latin America. The report aimed to celebrate the innovative practice that is happening throughout the southern cone of Latin America. The tenacity to overcome such obstacles and ambition to create a socially engaged theatre for young people will be ideals that I hope can be encompassed in to my own practice.

Young people in the UK are alienated from politics; they are not apathetic as may be represented in the media or by other public outlets. 37% of 18-24-year-olds voted in the 2005 UK general election and 76% of young people feel that they cannot influence governmental decisions (Guardian, 2010). There is a need to re-engage young people in politics in a way that is informed and led by young people. I hope the fellowship and its findings can contribute to this debate.

To return to the work of Paulo Freire, the need to interrogate the socio-economic contradictions of the society we live in is still present and ongoing. The work in Latin America has proven the importance of this interrogation, the need to be critical; the development of conscientisation. The development of the critical consciousness is crucial to ameliorate the alienation of young people from politics, the recognition of individual and societal contradictions enable an imagination of alternatives, as Holloway states: -

“Rather than looking to the hero with true class consciousness, a concept of revolution must start from the confusions and contradictions that tear us all apart.”

(Holloway, 2005:146)

I am indebted to all those that have made this possible. Thank you to Colectivo Sustento, Tercer Cordón and Perimetral festival for inspiring new ideas and enabling the conversation and debate. A special thank you to the Winston Churchill Memorial Trust for enabling the translation of ideas to practice.

I conclude with the closing monologue of Modecate by CS, the practice speaks a lot louder when it speaks for itself. The monologue proposes an idea; for theatre to enable social change, it needs to transcend the stage that it is happening on: -

“I stop talking because I had too much pain in my throat. But who cares about that? Who cares what a person like me thinks? What one of us thinks? Who really cares? No one cares. I could take advantage of this moment to say important things I could talk about world injustice, my peoples’ pain but why say so many things if no one is listening and if they listen, they don’t care. I am not intelligent, I am not a good person I have nothing.....but I know what’s going to happen. This is going to end, and we won’t see each other again. And everything will go back to normal. You will go back home, you will sleep and tomorrow you won’t remember anything. And I’ll still have this huge pain here in my throat. Everything that has been said did anybody hear it? Will anyone be different after this? What happens after the lights go out and the applause dies down, will depend on you. So that when someone speaks, someone also listens, really listens. “

Bibliography

Arts Council England (2014) **Further information on our funding decisions.**

(Online) Available at: -

www.artscouncil.org.uk/media/uploads/doc/further_information_funding_decisions_271010.doc arts council funding cuts 2014 (Accessed 20th November 2014)

Barker, C. (1977) **Theatre Games – A New Approach to Drama Training.**

London, Methuen Drama.

Barnardos (2014) **Children in trouble with the law.** (Online) Available at: -

http://www.barnardos.org.uk/what_we_do/our_work/youth_justice.htm

(accessed 16th November 2014)

Boon, R. & Plastow, J. Ed. (2004) **Theatre and Empowerment –**

Community Drama on the World Stage. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Colectivo Sustento (2014) **Create** (Online) Available at: -

<http://colectivosustento.org/creation/> (Accessed 11th November 2014)

Colectivo Sustento (2014) **Fenix & Ilusiones** (Online) Available at: -

<http://colectivosustento.org/creation/fenix-ilusiones-2/> (Accessed 16th November 2014)

Davison, J. (2013) **Clown: Readings in Theatre Practice**. Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

Equality trust (2014) **About Inequality** (Online) Available at: - <http://www.equalitytrust.org.uk/about-inequality/scale-and-trends> (Accessed 20th November 2014)

Freire, P. (1996) **Pedagogy of the Oppressed**. London, Penguin.

Galeano, E. (1973) **Open Veins of Latin America – Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent**. New York, Monthly Review Press

Ganguly, S. (2010) **Jana Sanskriti – Forum Theatre and Democracy in India**. London, Routledge.

Glass, P. (2014) **Interview with Colectivo Sustento**. 20th August. Colectivo Sustento Space, Santiago.

Haerpfer, C.W., Bernhagen, P. Inglehart, R.F., & Welzel, C. (2009) **Democratization**. Oxford, Oxford University Press.

Holloway, J. (2010) **Crack Capitalism**. London, Pluto Press.

Holloway, J. (2005) **Change the World Without Taking Power**. London, Pluto Press.

Hooks, B. Marginality as a site of resistance. In: - Ferguson, R., Gever, M., Minh-ha, T.T. & West, C. Ed. (1990) **Out There – Marginalization and Contemporary Cultures**. Massachusetts, The MIT Press.

Jimenez, G. (2014) **Interview with Colectivo Sustento – 2**. 20th August. Colectivo Sustento Space, Santiago.

Kirby, P. (2003) **Introduction to Latin America**. London, Sage Publications.

Morales, F & Vera, C. (2014) **Interview with Colectivo Sustento – 3**. 20th August. Colectivo Sustento Space, Santiago.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2012) **Income Distribution – Inequality**. (Online) Available at: - <http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?QueryId=26067&Lang=en> (Accessed 20th November 2014)

Palle, F (2014) **Interview with Fernando Palle**. 14th September 2014. Perimetral festival, Montevideo.

Plastow, J. (2014) Domestication or transformation? The Ideology of Theatre for Development in Africa. **Applied Theatre Research**. 2 (2), pp. 107-118.

Snyder – Young, D (2014) **Theatre of Good Intentions: Challenges and Hopes for Theatre and Social Change**. Hampshire, Palgrave Macmillan.

The Guardian (2014) **José Mujica: is this the world's most radical president?** (Online) Available at: - <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/18/-sp-is-this-worlds-most-radical-president-uruguay-jose-mujica> (Accessed 11th December 2014)

The Guardian (2010) **Politics isn't interested in young people**. (Online) Available at: <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2010/nov/25/politics-young-people-apathy> (Accessed 8th November 2014).

United Nations (2009) **Report of the Special Rapporteur on torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, Manfred Nowak**. (Online) Available at: - <http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/hrcouncil/docs/13session/A-HRC-13-39-Add2.pdf> (Accessed 11th December 2014)

Wilkinson, R. & Pickett, K. (2009) **The Spirit Level – Why more equal societies almost always do better**. London, Penguin Books Ltd

World Bank (2012) **Chile Overview**. (Online) Available at: - <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/chile/overview> (Accessed 20th November, 2014)