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**TRAVAILS IN LIMBO – an ethical and aesthetic
investigation into new approaches in the presentation
of Theatre for Young Audiences.**

A MINOR DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS (THEATRE MAKING AND
PERFORMANCE)

DEPARTMENT OF DRAMA
UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN

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ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this research was to investigate new aesthetic approaches in the creation of feminist Theatre for Young Audiences, specifically for early adolescent girls, through two collaborative workshop processes designed to be ethical and respectful of the participants' contribution. It simultaneously strives to elevate the work from the personal and instrumental to the artistic and universal. The parallels between the research into a new aesthetic for Theatre for Young Audiences and current trends in Applied Theatre practice caused the researcher to shift focus into self-study and a critique of practice in order to enhance self-reflexive praxis, which strives to be ethical. In this the researcher was guided by the methodologies employed by Gallagher, Hatton, Halverson, Worthmann. Bacon's theories of self-reflexivity in creative practice and the aesthetic theories of Schonmann are also considered. Issues surrounding representation took precedence in this study in an attempt to speak to the lived experiences of the early adolescent South African girl. As the work progressed, the difficulties in the process resulted in an inequitable relationship between the researcher and the participants who were unable to meet the criteria for successful theatre making without the researcher's facilitation. The findings as to the success of the final thesis production, in terms of its reception by young audiences, remain at the level of a preliminary investigation and are reliant on a postproduction questionnaire and follow up. It is hoped that the research will provide a platform for others interested in making Theatre for Young Audiences that does more than just rely on formulaic and stereotypical approaches to convey didactic messages that effectively instruct rather than affectively move the audience into a new understanding of themselves and the world in which they live.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS:

I extend my thanks and deepest gratitude to the following, without whose assistance I would not have reached this goal.

- ❖ My supervisor Jacqueline Singer
- ❖ Professor Hazel Barnes
- ❖ Dr. Gay Morris
- ❖ The Staff of the UCT Post Graduate Funding Office
- ❖ The Librarians of Hiddingh Library
- ❖ The Librarians of the University of Cape Town Inter Library Loan Department
- ❖ The Cast and Crew of *The Nest*
- ❖ The Cast and Crew of *Limbo*
- ❖ The Gr 9 Girls and Principal of Parklands College, Mrs. Sylvia Steyn
- ❖ My Peers in the Masters Programme
- ❖ Derek Rocher, for his unfaltering support, thanks D.
- ❖ And everyone else who has had to put up with me for the last two years, I am forever in your debt.

This degree was partially funded by the K.W. Johnstone Research Scholarship and the Harry Crossley Foundation Postgraduate Scholarship.

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Introduction

This thesis charts the research journey embarked upon in an attempt to create work of a higher artistic value for a neglected audience i.e. the early adolescent girl. The limbo of the title refers both to the liminal stage of development associated with early adolescence and the limbo that I, as theatre maker, found myself travelling in my quest to make work for this unexplored demographic. Not applied theatre and not adult theatre, the new work I was contemplating required an investigation into the interests and concerns of the early adolescent South African girl, which led to an examination of self in relation to the subject. The need for ethical practice took precedent in the development and execution of processes. It was hoped the study would prove equitable and not favor the researcher's aims over the participants' contributions. The purpose of this study being to closely examine my position as the 'adult in the room' in relation to the young participants and to scrutinize how my theatre making agenda of elevating Theatre for Young Audience from an outcomes based applied theatre paradigm to a work of art ultimately contributed towards the empowerment or disempowerment of the original participants and intended audience. My understanding of the word aesthetic in the title refers to the high design emphasis in my style of theatre making which, in concept and execution, attempts to create a theatrical world steeped in myth, atmosphere and other worldliness. My theatre making style is consciously theatrical in its visual components as well as in its break with the mundane and ordinary.

I have long been of the opinion that South African girls between the ages of twelve and sixteen were in need of theatre, which reflects their reality and speaks in their voice. I began the work of *The Fairy Godmother Project* with a conviction that I, as a mature feminist theatre maker, had a responsibility towards the younger generation to develop new work that would act as a celebration of the feminine, in both form and content. This grew out of the dissatisfaction that I felt at the lack of feminist texts and strong female characters in South African theatre, as well as disenchantment with what was happening locally in Theatre for Young Audiences, which seemed to be stagnating under the theatre establishment's dismissive 'its just for kids' attitude towards work aimed at the under 16s. This attitude I believe continues to discourage aspirant young theatre makers from taking TYA work, or research in the field, seriously. I found this to be at odds with the developments occurring in the education system where more young people than ever before in this country's history are being exposed to Drama and are interested in performance. Yet there is a dearth of theatre that is of a high aesthetic standard to go along with this experience, of theatre that

offers something to aspire to, both creatively and as human beings. All work undertaken thus far in *The Fairy Godmother Project* is an attempt to offer the youth something more.

In Chapter One I address my position as researcher/artist in a self-reflexive account of the processes engaged in and the difficulties faced in creating work that does not steal stories from, nor demean, the early adolescent girl's life experience. As my research progressed, my concerns regarding ethical issues began to focus in on Representation, specifically with regards to the theatrical portrayal of adolescent girls. After the medium project *The Nest*, performed at The Intimate Theatre in December 2010, I reached a turning point that forced me to examine myself in relation to the subjects of my study, much as a critical ethnographer would.

In Chapter Two I explain how I came to challenge my own mental image of early adolescent girls and expand upon the ethical issues surrounding misrepresentation. My focus in this chapter rests in the workshops engaged in with the girls and I compare my findings to those of other TYA practitioners, such as Kathleen Gallagher and Christine Hatton, who have in other projects worked towards similar ends. I unpack the theories of the well told story and explain how I came to the decision to advance the work through a secondary process with students in order to avoid what Kathleen Gallagher describes as the 'It could have been so much better' melancholia (2010: 5), not only for my own sake but for that of the original participants too.

In Chapter Three I discuss the shift from instrumental to the artistic in the final thesis production in an effort to create affective work for TYA audiences. I unpack the aesthetic choices that I am making in the creation of an outward manifestation of an inner state of being, between childhood and young adulthood, with its inhabitants, both living and dead. The aesthetic choices in the final piece will not be exclusively mine as the process of theatre making for this project is wholly inclusive of the ideas of the cast. To facilitate the emergence of genuine feelings of collective ownership is a principal objective in all my work with young people. I view myself as a fellow explorer, an equal participant in the work; there is no ego involved for my part, no insistence on sole authorship. This perspective I believe to be feminist as it represents a conscious break with the male theatrical tradition and can be seen as a subversive anti-authoritarian act.

TYA and Applied Theatre Parallels.

Over the past two years of this study it has been my endeavor to develop Theatre with a feminist message for Young Audiences, both *with* and *for* early adolescent girls, i.e. twelve to sixteen year olds, under the umbrella heading of *The Fairy Godmother Project*. Although Theatre for Young Audiences (TYA) is technically not applied theatre, it has become apparent throughout the course of my research that there are definite parallels between the two forms: they share the same ethos and are concerned with much of the same ethical considerations.

The content of applied theatre is commonly supplied by the participants directly in the form of their own stories or by the community who are often also the target audience through the research carried out in that community. However the shaping of those stories and the research into the dramatic forms that can communicate powerfully is often seen as the province of facilitators who use their experience to guide the participants through a bewildering array of poetic choices. These choices have themselves to be related to the cultural parameters of the participants so that the chosen forms can enter into a meaningful relation to their life experiences and understandings (Prentski, 2009: 20).

This quote I found, in my dual role as workshop facilitator and theatre maker, to have particular resonance with what I was attempting to do in *The Fairy Godmother Project*. In essence what Tim Prentski describes as common applied theatre practice is strikingly similar to the work undertaken in Drama classes with young people, with the teacher in the role of creative facilitator. What I eventually came to explore in the project is how work changes from its original state of being when passed through a secondary process with participants more skilled in the poetic conventions of theatre making and how, in turn, the original and younger workshop participants, will respond to this reworking of their stories by their 'older sisters'. As a theatre maker my ethical and artistic goals have been, through this process of creative reinvention or transformation of autobiographical material, to produce theatre of a higher aesthetic quality than could be achieved with the original participants yet remain true to, and respectful of, the original workshop participants' contributions.

It is my hope that, in offering an account of the emerging self-reflexive praxis that has developed out of this research, there will be something of value for other theatre practitioners interested in devising work with young people through processes that strive to adhere to ethical principles based in mutual respect. My intention is to encourage practice *with* and theatre *for* young people, that makes both strong emotional and cognitive connections with audiences in a genuine dialogical

exchange. Wan-Jung Wang in her study of the performance of oral history describes it as follows,

True dialogue is to turn to others with your body, soul and intention with sincerity and heart to search the meaning, with questions and anxiety, with respect and self-esteem to listen to others and understand others as well as oneself (Wang, 2010: 565).

Chapter One – Ethics

This chapter is an attempt to map the empirical research journey embarked upon over the course of the study. It is my hope that, in offering a chronicle of the theoretical investigations and the emerging praxis that has developed out of this journey, there will be something of value for other TYA practitioners.

The process of reflective practice (is) aimed at enabling teachers to solve problems (and) demystify experiences by 'looking at them squarely in the face' (McCammon & Smigel, 2004: 2).

Through the research, I am speaking to my experiences as a teacher and a theatre maker, I have come to understand that this is the only way I can be ethical. I make no further apologies or any claims of universality in this work. I can speak for no 'other'.¹ I shall share with the reader an account of how, in the three works created thus far my stance as artist/researcher has shifted from a position of subtle authoritarianism to a more holistic one and explain how this was achieved through an investigation of the self, conducted through practical theatre making.

Professional Ethics

In my role as a teacher I have clear ethical guidelines to follow in the form of The South African Council for Educators Act no 31 of 2000. All educators are legally required to be a member the South African Council of Educators and, by this law, to adhere to a Code of Professional Ethics². The Code addresses the educator's conduct in relation to the learner, their parents, the community, their colleagues and employers, and the Council and profession as a whole. However as a Drama teacher I have frequently felt that some of the creative teaching methods found in the Drama classroom could be construed as a breach of the code.

[...] drama and theatre praxis relies on a certain freedom and flexibility on the part of the facilitator/ director to be effective (Barnes, 2011: 141).

It is for this reason the drama teacher is afforded a license to 'play' and, it is understood within the wider school community, that, within reason, the same rules of behaviour, for teacher and learner, do not always apply in the drama class. I was aware that what I was proposing to do in *The Fairy Godmother Project* had ethical ramifications beyond the scope of this code. Although not engaging in what is considered to be pure Applied Theatre, I, in planning to conduct research with a

¹ For a rigorous denouncement of the notions of the Other, the reader is directed to bell hooks *Choosing The Margin As a Space of Radical Openness* in *The Applied Theatre Reader*.

² See Appendix One.

group to which I was an outsider by virtue of my age, had much in common with Applied Theatre practitioners so I looked to this discipline for ethical guidelines. Hazel Barnes, in *Mapping Ethics in Applied Drama and Theatre*, outlines the problematic stance of the emancipator/facilitator in Applied Theatre practice. As a practice, applied drama and theatre, although often engaged with peoples described as 'vulnerable', is largely unregulated. At best, it empowers participants through a process of shared and equitable engagement. At worst, the Applied Theatre practitioner, in assuming the position of benevolent cultural benefactor, is at risk of embodying demi-god status and of further oppressing participant communities through representations that lack cultural sensitivity, by withholding a transparency of purpose and by inhibiting their (the participants') creative contributions to the drama (Taylor, 2003: 3).

Barnes' article includes a Declaration of Ethics³, that emerged out of workshops and discussions held at the *Drama for Life Initial Africa Conference in Applied Drama and Theatre* at the University of the Witwatersrand in November 2008. It is noted as significant by Barnes that this is a not a charter or code. At that time it was felt that a declaration was better suited to a discipline that relies on creative processes and artistic expression. Workshops provided a forum for discussion and reflection on ethical issues arising predominantly out of the work undertaken by applied drama and theatre in partnership with health organizations, more specifically in relation to work conducted around HIV and Aids. The discussions echoed points raised three years earlier by researchers in the *Research in Drama Education* journal's special edition on ethics.

There are always ethical decisions to be made about how to maintain the rich inter-personal relationships often built through practice whilst also ensuring that the research process neither betrays the participants' trust nor inhibits their contributions to the drama (Nicholson, 2005: 119).

In this collection of articles the Applied Theatre researcher is counselled that the only way to establish if one's practice was indeed ethical was to conduct research into the self (the practitioner) in relation to the other (the participant), to practice self-examination. Researchers were encouraged against self-interest and the exploitation and silencing of the participants in order to achieve personal aims. 'Issues of power, trust, care and authority' suggests Helen Nicholson, 'remain of central importance to those who work in drama education in all its various inflections' (Nicholson, 2005: 119). In describing the intention necessary for ethical work in Applied Theatre Hazel

³ See Appendix Two.

Barnes calls to '[...]the concept of *agape* – a deep love of humanity which is expressed through absolute caring and a sense of responsibility towards others' (Barnes, 2011). This alignment with a position of a deep respect for others, results in a practice that ensures mutual benefit. 'Good' practice is thus inclusive, sensitive in its aesthetic choices and conscious of the unequal power relationship between facilitator and participant.

The Mantle of the Fairy Godmother

From the outset of this project I had identified all work to be undertaken as falling under the umbrella heading of *The Fairy Godmother Project*. I left this open to interpretation and chose not to reveal why I had identified the project with a character from fantasy. Nor was I ever asked why I had chosen this particular name for a project with early adolescent girls. Although I had stated a desire for radicalism in my research and theatre making, the rather innocuous, non-threatening title of the project, I believe, conjured up feelings of safety amongst the academy, and a sense that I, in so naming the project, meant no harm and would proceed ethically.

It is widely assumed that the theatre, particularly for children, can and should teach. It is also widely assumed that the theatre can and does do harm, real harm, especially to children. And it is universally assumed that even if the theatre does not teach, it should do no harm (Levy, 2005: 20).

Although seeming to offer some form of reassurance of wholesomeness upon examination the role of the Fairy Godmother, as described in fairy tales in the Western tradition, is far from innocuous and benign. Her influence over her mortal charge's destiny echoes the supreme power of the Fates of Greek mythology who held the powers of life and death over mortals and were believed to 'visit the cradle of every newborn, to determine the child's future' (Walker, 1983: 303). The Fairy Godmother is a relative newcomer to the cast of stock characters found in fairy folklore of the Western Tradition.⁴ The 'donor' in the guise of a Fairy Godmother, as we know her today, first appeared in the literary fairy tales, or *précieuses*, of seventeenth century France (Briggs, 1967: 222). The Fairy Godmother was a literary construct, having much in common with the godmothers of the French Court in the Seventeenth century whose custom it was to use their influence and connections to advance their godchildren's fortunes, and less with the original 'donor' figure of oral folklore. The Fairy Godmother's over-riding concern for the moral wellbeing and

⁴ She is a recent addition to the 'magical helper' or 'donor' category, identified by Vladimir Propp as one of the eight roles, and the eleventh 'function', found in traditional folk or Wonder tales. The 'donor' took many forms, often appearing as animals or birds and made donations of useful gifts to help the heroine to continue her journey (Propp, 1928).

fortunes of her human charges is considered by folklorists to be a significant departure from the role played by the 'donor' of earlier folktales (Briggs, 1967: 223). Unlike the magic helper, who is chanced upon almost by accident by the heroine on her journey, The Fairy Godmother often appears when *she* deems it necessary to do so. She states her intention to help without being requested to do so. She intercedes and intervenes on behalf of her young human charges and her actions are regarded as wholesome and nurturing. She acts as mentor to her mortal charges and makes gifts of clothes, jewels, carriages and other necessities as well as imparting wisdom. Most significantly she *transforms* her godchild so as to afford her the best opportunities life can offer, but not without some expectation of gratitude.⁵

Fairy Godmothering and Applied Theatre Practice

It was precisely in this element of transformation, that I found parallels between the Fairy Godmother of fairy tales and Applied Theatre and TYA Practitioners, much of whose practice has been conducted with the stated intention of facilitating transformations of individuals and communities. Based on the liberation pedagogy of Paulo Friere and emancipatory theatre praxis of Augusto Boal, the phenomenon of 'theatre maker as agent of change' was long at the core of Applied Theatre practice.

Too often we see ourselves as agents of transformation, rather than co-authors: we see others as needing to have their consciousness raised, but not ourselves. There is much talk of change, yet little talk of how that change is to be effected, by whom, and at what human cost (McDonnell, 2005: 132).

The claim for the ability of Applied Theatre to transform begs the questions of who exactly is being transformed from what? As well as who is doing the transforming? And, finally, who judges the transformations that have been achieved (Taylor, 2003: 3)?

"I know what has brought you here", the fairy godmother said, looking at the Princess. "I understand the deep sadness in your heart. But with me by your side, there is no need to worry. Nothing can harm you so long as you follow my advice" (Perrault in Tatar 1999: 110).

'As long as you follow my advice', conditional and yet comforting, those words encapsulated one of the many ethical dilemmas I faced at the outset of this project with early adolescent girls. Through the research I began to question whether or not my practice as a theatre maker for children and young people, is indeed sound? Am I perpetuating a traditional and patriarchal approach, assuming a position of superiority combined with 'well-intentioned' purpose and, in so doing, putting myself

⁵ The figure of the Fairy Godmother shares many attributes with a guardian angel. This figure of a benevolent sponsor is common to the Judeo-Christian tradition and was almost certainly evident in Catholic teachings in the time of Charles Perrault.

and my ideals above those of the children for whom I create work? Disempowering the child; disregarding their lived experiences in the world in favor of societies' efforts to get young people to adopt ways of being that are more in line with adult belief systems? John Stephens in his analysis of ideology in children's literature notes:

Writing for children is usually purposeful, its intention being to foster in the child reader [viewer] a positive apperception of some socio-cultural values which, it is assumed, are shared by author [theatre maker] and audience. These values include contemporary morality and ethics, a sense of what is valuable in a culture's past...and aspirations about the present and the future (Stephens, 1992: 3).

In undertaking a project with early adolescent girls, I sensed that there was a need to discover new ways of making TYA that did not prioritize the adult experience, did not patronize the audience and offered more than just a moral lesson.

It seems to be both condescending and dictatorial to perceive theatre for young people as being primarily about the communication of moral lessons. Instead, and much more broadly, theatre provides models of ways in which the world can be understood (Reason, 2010: 107).

Though anxious to avoid creating texts that belonged 'firmly in the domain of cultural practices which existed for the sole purpose of socializing their target audience' (Stephens, 1992: 8), I harboured some doubts that, influenced by my familiar role of educator, my work could ever truly be purged of didacticism; too caught up in what Kathleen Gallagher describes as 'our compulsion to educate' (Gallagher, 2006: 98). To continue with the project meant striving to liberate the work from the authoritarian adult voice and listening to participants instead of steering them in the direction I wanted the work to go. 'To judge myself ethically', as Brian Edmiston in his summation of Mikhail Bakhtin's philosophy of ethical accountability suggests, 'I must be answerable to others' evaluations of my actions at the same time as I expect them to be answerable to me, and answerable to others' (Edmiston, 2000: 66).

In her 2001 study on the effects of Drama on Canadian adolescent girls Kathleen Gallagher counsels against placing the researcher's motives at the center of the research and of using the participants as mere resources (Gallagher, 2001:16). In continuing with the project my stance as researcher had to be put under the spotlight and examined. Performance ethnographer Dwight Conquergood identifies four possible ethical pitfalls in the stance adopted by Performance Ethnographic researchers in relation to the Other. They are as follows 'The Custodian's Rip Off, The Enthusiast's Infatuation', 'The Curator's Exhibitionism' and 'The Skeptic's Cop Out' (Conquergood, 1985: 5). These research positions fall in the space between

identity and difference, between detachment from and commitment to the researched. The stance of *The Custodian's Rip Off* is that of a 'strong attraction to the other coupled with extreme detachment' (which) 'results in acquisitiveness instead of genuine enquiry, more plunder than performance' (Conquergood, 1985: 5). *The Enthusiast's Infatuation* creates work that reveals too close an identification with the Other, although coupled with a deep sense of commitment, it is unethical in that it trivializes the Other. *The Curator's Exhibitionism* denies the Other the same status as the researcher, who presents the Other as a curiosity to be examined precisely because of its Difference. It is a sensationalist and an immoral stance because it dehumanizes the Other. Finally, *The Skeptic's Cop Out* is a position of non-engagement with the Other precisely because it is Other. Conquergood concludes that the only ethical position from which to explore performance ethnography is one of the Dialogical Performance, which implies a 'genuine conversation' between the self and other in an open exchange that

...speaks not of works but to works, rather with works. It refuses to eliminate either of the two voices present [...] the author is a thou not a (s)he, an interlocutor with whom one discusses and even debates human values (Todorov in Conquergood, 1985: 10).

Abandoning Dorothy, or The Search for a Methodology

I don't have a name for what I do. As a person it seems to me I stand midway between all that has happened before I arrived and what is now. What I do in this moment obviously shapes up some part of what is to come. Everything that has happened before me I have something in common with, and this is my secret for finding material for drama (Heathcote in Wagner, 1979: 13).

As a young teacher I had been greatly influenced in my style of teaching by the work of the late Dorothy Heathcote. Her child-centered philosophy, teacher in role method and fascination with myth has shaped my practice as both teacher and theatre maker for young people. Heathcote's influence was further evident in my disregard of the need to 'research my own practice', or to even see it as having any value. The sole focus on a child-centered approach negated, for almost two decades, what this teacher had to say about her practice.

In his examination of power and privilege in drama education Phillip Taylor suggests that 'what was previously believed to be true (in drama in education research) is now problematic' (Taylor in Ackroyd, 2006: 10). The drama education practice of pioneers, such as Dorothy Heathcote and Nellie McCaslin, were attacked as being uncritical of hetero-normativity and non-representational (Taylor, 2006: 10). Probing deeper into the discourses surrounding critical ethnographic research in drama

education, specifically with regards to performing and self-ethnography, I discovered a rich seam of reflexive analysis offered as a means by which to gauge ethical engagement with others. The critical ethnographer in drama research is primarily concerned with issues of 'interpretation and representation' of both the 'social reality and the drama practice in an education setting' (Gallagher in Ackroyd, 2006: 64). The goal of critical ethnography in the context of drama education being the exposure of, and challenge to, perceived unequal power relations. The researcher examines how representations are constructed, how the 'legitimacy of those representations' are evaluated and whether or not it is possible to 'effect change in the world' (Gallagher, 2006: 65). All questions I felt applicable to the process aspect of my work on the floor as an educator. However as a creative practitioner the research methodology that had the greatest resonance, and that I subsequently attempted to adopt into my own practice, rested in Jane Bacon's account of embodied self-reflexivity. Bacon suggests that 'developing an embodied reflexive approach is a tool that will bring clarity to the author-informant relationship and illuminate the appropriateness of decisions made concerning the representations of informants' (Bacon in Ackroyd, 2006: 139). This process of reading the body and monitoring its emotional reactions in relation to the other was something I did instinctively.

The Story Thief

However original we believe our actions to be they are still 'stolen behavior'. Action matter 'is never specific to its author or its recipient' (Derrida in Thompson, 2003: 66).

As a theatre-maker, I admit to operating from a position similar to that of Dorothy Heathcote, a position of embodied knowledge. I am guilty of using ideas garnered from various sources, theoretical and other, but seldom reflected upon or catalogued in journals or academic writing. Writing about my own theatre making process has thus been a great challenge to me. I have in the past been unable to find the words to describe what I do, and how I do it. I rely on intuition and follow embodied signals implicitly; of course I am not alone in this instinctual method of working. As artistic director, Emma Rice, of the experimental theatre company Knee High confirms,

There is no formula to the way we make theatre. However, it always starts with the story. No, it starts before then. It starts with an itch, a need, an instinct. [...] Each one is raw, relevant and personal. Stories have an ability to present themselves, to emerge as if from nowhere. But they are never from nowhere. This is the seminal moment of instinct. This is when your subconscious stakes its claim and intervenes in your carefully ordered life. I sit up when a story taps me on the shoulder. I respect co-incidence. I listen to impulse (Rice: 2011).

In rehearsal rooms I feel my way into the work. My performance storytelling work is unscripted, I prefer to create outlines and 'see what happens'. In devising work with a group I never really know what is going to happen but trust that something will. The act of creation for me is arcane, a possession; with a group it becomes a mutual exploration of an idea. A sense of danger has become a prerequisite in my practice. I am a magpie, I read accounts of the experiences of others and I embody them and their stories. I devour and absorb images and sounds made by others and in so doing they become mine. I take ownership, not with my conscious mind, but deep within me, a place beyond words, a place of signs, images, dreams and symbols, a place of magic and alchemy. I ingest knowledge and regurgitate it when it is useful; its original form irretrievable and unrecognizable. I create from a place deep within my body, sometimes new work emerges from my joints like *The Selkie*, which emerged from a hip bone that clicked into place, other times my bone marrow as it did in *The Nest*, or my lymphatic system in *Unmarked*.

Embodied self-reflexive practice offered me a way to redress the gaps in my knowledge of my praxis as facilitator/theatre-maker. The researcher using this methodology is constantly engaging in physical action in order to facilitate new knowledge. Through this method I have come to realize that I am constantly engaged in reflexive practice that is based on a series of hunches, physical sensations and responses to situations as they arise. I try not to over think, which consistently brings me to a creative standstill. I try to get out of the way of the work, in order to allow the surprising and unthinkable to emerge from this well of embedded knowledge deep within me. I am aware that this knowledge does not come out of the ether, it is a result of years of experience, both in life and in work, nor do I make any claims regarding its truth; it is only a reflection of me.

There is not some big truth out there that we know and tell. We create from what we hear and see. Reality, and our knowledge of it, are contextually constructed and reconstructed from our personal pathways and experiences (McCammon and Smigel, 2004: 4).

Chapter Two – The Telling of Tales and the Ethics of Representation

I'll Tell You My Stories; Then You Tell Me Yours

In planning to engage in a process of extraction of personal narratives with the girls, I decided to tell a personal story of my own before conducting a workshop in the character of The Fairy Godmother. This became the minor project *The Selkie*, a solo performance piece that interwove a personal narrative with an Irish myth. In the performance I became Fairy Godmother to the audience and, in doing so, assumed a relationship to them that set us apart in terms of life experience and appearance. I was not trying to be like them for to do so felt disrespectful, nor did I tell them a story about my own adolescence. In my telling of the story regarding a health issue I was there to 'advise' and 'caution the audience'.

You may be asking yourself why I, a middle aged woman with reddening eyes and yellowing teeth am telling you young girls this story of pain and regret, dearly beloved, it is because I don't want you to make the same mistakes that I have (Dodders, 2010: The Selkie).

In adopting a strong visual aesthetic in the presentation of the storyteller in a costume inspired by early twentieth century illustrator Edmund Dulac's Fairy Godmother¹ and topped by a rather incongruous and beribboned white Afro wig, balanced over a Kabuki inspired heavily painted face, I was engaging in aesthetic distancing for two reasons. Firstly, by encouraging the audience to examine the seeming incongruent elements of the costume I was hoping to encourage a similar questioning in their minds as to what was being said in the piece and secondly I was firmly establishing myself as someone, or something, Other.

The actual audience I performed for consisted of members of staff and post-graduate students. At the beginning of the performance every audience member was given a gift of a small white stone, without any explanation as to what its purpose was, or what they were expected to do with it. The stone was thus a 'gift' with no significance. Later in the performance the audience came to understand what the stones represented but were not given an opportunity to use them as the workshop process which was designed to follow on from the performance was, due to the maturity of the audience, omitted.

¹ Edmund Dulac's illustrations for *Cinderella* were published as part of the Allied War Effort in WW1.

An element of the piece overlooked by the adult audience was my attempt to represent an embodiment of the researcher in the work through an installation arranged at the back of the room. I placed a mannequin's head with pearls, scarf and wearing a ringmaster's top hat on a desk along with piles of books, files and papers. My intention was to physically represent the binary at work in the two seemingly separate roles of the researcher as observer through the installation, and as participant performing the research on stage. As I performed, I experienced the sensation of being watched and watching, and engaging not only with the audience, but also with myself in role of researcher/performer. Ideally the installation would have been discussed in the post-performance workshop in an effort to be transparent about the participants' contributions toward my ongoing research.

Upon reflection I came to the conclusion that, if I were to tell this story again, I had to include the workshop process so as to allow for dialogue, and it had to be performed for the intended audience. What emerged in the post-performance feedback was an appreciation of the poetic elements of the piece that were described as 'beautiful'. The economy of movement, the use of voice and slightly heightened language was described as 'transgressive' and 'refreshing'. This I felt was a success in an otherwise flawed piece, and I resolved to further explore the aesthetic dimension in the next project.²

Five Girls - A Thousand Stories

Storytelling is one of our primary forms of communication with other people. Narrativity is the principle way that human beings order their experience in time. It is also one of the primary ways that human beings make sense out of seemingly unrelated sequences of events (Worth, 2008: 42).

What do you want to say to early adolescent girls? What stories do you want to tell them? These were the questions I posed to the cast of five late adolescent female Drama students, from the Drama department of the University of Cape Town, at the start of the rehearsal period of *The Nest*, November 2010. In asking these questions I established with the cast that I was less interested in what I had to say, and more interested in their opinions. The starting question was in line with Dorothy Heathcote's method of evoking rather than directing (Wagner, 1979: 20). I wished to let the drama emerge from the group and I saw my role as shaping the content into a theatrical form that I hoped would be affective and reverent. The process began with

² The reader is referred to Appendix 5 for photographic images from the three productions mentioned which illustrate the heightened aesthetic employed in the work.

a combination of guided visualizations, writing and drawing tasks, and improvisations which led to the sharing of personal narratives about their own early adolescent experiences and those of their mothers, aunts and grandmothers.

Once the cast had found their voices, and not everyone it has to be added did, the stories flowed freely. I believe this was because a sense of trust was established as well as a sense of purpose amongst the group. There was a deep concern amongst the group that certain stories be omitted from the final piece for fear of disclosure. The topic of sex was singled out by the cast, as an area that had to be handled carefully, as there was a concern with regards to instilling a fear of sex. The cast felt this had been the message they had collectively received about sex at that age. This sense of responsibility and protection felt towards their 'younger sisters' had much in common with Hatton's 2003 project with adolescent girls, who wanted 'other girls to listen, see, share and reflect upon what the performance offered' (Hatton, 2003: 146).

The final devised text reflected a girl's journey through the three years of early adolescence, a time described by the cast as difficult and above all confusing. The narrative shifted from the known and safe world of the girl's bedroom to a liminal world, inhabited by strange female characters that either helped or hindered her progress on her journey towards her new self.

The structure of the narrative was based on Joseph Campbell's 1947 model of the classic hero's journey of mythology³. Due to the brevity of the rehearsal period I took the decision to work within this structure and attempted to customize it to the experience of the early adolescent girl as she navigates her path between childhood and young adulthood. This choice of narrative structure was later criticized as being 'predictable and plodding' by the adult members of the audience and 'too much of my own voice was heard in the piece' was another criticism. I think what was implied by these comments was that the structure of the narrative was too close to the traditional source and thus closely aligned with the didactic voice I was trying to remove. The visual aesthetic was again described as beautiful; the combination of emphasized femininity and historical references in the costume, which subconsciously reflected past female oppression, and the heightened theatricality of the performances were well received. With more time for rehearsals I felt I could

³ See Appendix 6.

eradicate more of my voice and allow the narrative structure to emerge rather than force it onto the process. Typical of the drama teacher as described by Hatton (2003: 147) I had reinforced the dominant meta-narratives of society in the work. Worth retaining however was the aesthetic and this was of primary consideration to me when entering into the process of the solo project.

Unmarked, March 2011, was an attempt to unpack my personal motivations for undertaking this project. It was a further opportunity to explore an aesthetic rooted in the feminine, for I had come to understand that that is what I was attempting to do in the minor and medium projects. It was also more significantly a termination of the research position of subtle-authoritarianism through a performance. The performer/researcher washed the body then washed herself, dressed the body then dressed herself, blessed the body then blessed herself and finally bid the body and the research position of 'all-knowing' farewell, and left. The action was thus deeply symbolic. This representation of a research position in the performances, from the initial installation of a dis-embodied head in *The Selkie*; to the instructional Fairy Godmother character in *The Nest*, to the death and rebirth of one of embodied self-reflexivity in *Unmarked*, indicated what I believe to be a shift towards a more ethical one.

The aesthetic choices of story, puppet, candle light, music and costume were intended to move the audience and to engage them on a visceral level but also to explore emotional rawness and an unfettered unsentimental image of the feminine, which I hoped to carry into the final thesis production. My search for the mysterious place of meaning making deep within myself was I hoped being partially illuminated through this piece of work both for myself, and the audience. Only after submitting to this process did I feel ready to begin the research project with the early adolescent girls. I felt I had addressed my unconscious impulse to educate and dredged to the surface anything from my history, which may have jeopardized the project and was not asking anyone to engage in anything that I was not prepared to do myself.

Tell Me Your Story

We each have our own stories to live by. One story we may tell currently is only a fragment of the whole story; it is framed by memory and context and suggests the turns our whole story may take in the future. If we invite our students to use their stories to frame the drama, we invite them to activate that narrative meaning-making process, to organize in story form what is significant for them, as only they see it (Hatton, 2003: 151).

In the telling of stories the teller has a variety of objectives, Roger Schank identifies the goals inherent in telling a story as falling broadly into either *Me* or *You* goals. *Me-goals* are those intentions that storytellers have for themselves. There are five intentions for *Me-goal* narratives: to achieve catharsis, to get attention, to win approval, to seek advice, or to describe themselves. *Me* narratives, especially those that are told repeatedly, become who we are and telling them allows us to feel those feelings that define us yet again. *You-goals* are those intentions storytellers have with respect to others, they too fall into five categories: illustrate a point, make a listener feel some way or another, tell a narrative that transports the listener, transfer some piece of information in our heads into the heads of the listener, or to summarize significant events (Schank in McCammon and Smigel, 2004: 4).

Christine Hatton, in her report of a dual project conducted with adolescent girls in Australia and Great Britain, echoes the commonality of using personal narratives as starting points in drama classes with girls. In the Drama class the teacher 'enters into a relationship of colleague with the participants, researching together as they search for form, what is created is a community of enquiry' (Bowell and Heap, 2005: 66). The nature of process drama in the classroom is one which 'draws teacher and learners into a creative, aesthetic and educative crucible in which a powerful artistic partnership is forged' (Bowell and Heap, 2005: 69). Students are encouraged to '...share personal narratives as part of their work in drama' and 'develop their own, shared texts through participation in drama activities' (McCammon and Smigel, 2004: 2).

By offering these stories as content for drama, others can not only see into the personal narratives of others, but the collaborative process allows the stories to be retold in new and dynamic ways, thereby allowing a kind of re-vision to take place (Hatton, 2003: 151).

Searching for Miss Teen SA

As a high school Drama teacher I work with teenagers on a daily basis. Just as there are parts of me that the learners I work with know nothing of, so naturally, there is much I do not know about them. I may be familiar with the cognitive, physical and emotional developmental stages of early adolescence in a general sense and towards the purposes of educating them, but this too does not mean I know them. As a Drama teacher there are, as previously stated, opportunities to delve into the realm of the spirit, or psyche, of the learners. In the workshops it was my intention to get to know the girls on a deeper level, so as to be able to assist them in their efforts to

deliver a self-representational image of South African early adolescent girls to the drama students with whom I would be embarking on a secondary workshop process and in the creation of the final thesis production.

...any representation created to speak for a community is vulnerable to misrepresentation or simplification (Preston, 2009: 67).

In April 2011 I began the process on the floor with two groups of Grade 9 girls, between the ages of fourteen to fifteen, at the secondary school I work at, which is situated in an outer suburb of Cape Town. At the school the Grade Nines are segregated into single sex classes for a year. We met twice a week for forty minutes over a period of ten weeks. The workshops were conducted during their scheduled class time. Most of the practical work was completed in their own time and they met in the afternoons and over weekends to complete the project of their own volition. I had a prior history of working with the girls for a period of about three years, in that time building a relationship of trust and understanding. The girls are mixed along lines of race, economic status, home language and religion; their home lives are a mixture of single, married, divorced, absent and surrogate parents; some have biological siblings, blended families and some are only children. Rather than try to describe the group as a social science researcher I prefer as a theatre maker to leave it to the girls to say who they are, and to listen to what they want to say about themselves.

The process with the girls began with a question: *What do you, as a teenage girl in South Africa today, want to say?* At first this invitation to speak was greeted with a resounding silence then a voice emerged that asked, *'Well what do you want us to say?'* I realized that my assumption that girls had a lot to say about their lives was premature and that as a facilitator, I had work to do to help girls understand that their stories were worth listening to. I eventually came to understand that they were not at a point of disclosure, not because they didn't trust me, but because their *Me* and *You* stories were still emerging. Sadly they didn't feel their stories or those of their mothers and grandmothers were worth listening to. This echoed Christine Hatton's findings in her 2003 international case study of middle secondary girls. Hatton's study used narrative based drama methods to encourage girls *'to explore their lives through the art form of drama'* (Hatton, 2003: 139). Initially she experienced resistance from the participants who doubted the importance and significance of their lived experiences. As Hatton observes:

The student's lack of belief in their own stories or indeed the relevance of the stories of women is clearly evident in their concern that the work would automatically be 'crap' (Hatton, 2003: 150).

and

Women and girls have historically been positioned as ghosts in their own lives, conditioned to doubt their own voices and needs (Hatton, 2003: 155).

Given the opportunity to be heard was, for many of the girls in the group described as 'overwhelming' and 'frightening' and it highlighted to the girls the lack of respect given to their stories and lives by society. This response echoed the reflection of one of Hatton's course participants, Celina, who said:

I had never before been given license to offer my own opinion and for it to be treated as valid, and this was a big change for me (Celina in Hatton, 2003: 148).

As a researcher, I had firstly to decide on a scaffolding strategy for the participants and secondly I had to put any assumptions I may be holding about the subject of the study, the girls themselves, aside. My methodology in creating devised work with the students in *The Nest*, had relied upon a degree of technical competence and an emotional distance from their younger adolescent selves that I could not assume to be present in younger participants. A scaffold had to be introduced that would support the participants' development as they acquired and internalized new knowledge, both of themselves and of the theatre-making process.⁴

Before tackling the construction of the scaffold I felt it necessary to address the question of who I thought Miss SA Teen was. Was she the Ophelia of Mary Pipher's 1994 study, reaching maturity in 'a girl poisoning culture' in which she was 'doomed to an adolescence of self-loathing, physical disappointment, and the subjugation of the self in order to win the attention of males and at risk of failing to live up to the potential of [her] younger years'? (Pipher, 1994: 12). Was she Rachel Simmons' accursed Good Girl programmed to please, or the bullied social outcast of *Odd Girl Out*? Was she the social climber of the adolescent world of Rosalind Wiseman's Queen Bee or Wannabee variety? Was she, as Courtney E. Martin suggests, starving and carving her body in an attempt to conform to the new normality of self-

⁴ Scaffolding is a constructivist tool commonly employed in the teaching of the creative arts.

abnegation? As my received mental image of teenage girls began to unravel I found I had other questions to ask Miss SA Teen. How did she feel about her life? Did she have hopes and dreams that were different from her mother and grandmother, or did she want the same things? What did she fear, who did she love and how did she use art to express herself? What did she want to say, about herself and the world she was living in and how did this differ from the world she wanted to live in?

The most important question I had to ask myself was what if the girl's answers were at odds with my beliefs as a feminist? How would I deal with this in the workshop situation and in the final piece? In order to answer these questions I first had to examine my mental image of the early adolescent girl, in order to avoid stereotyping or portraying an image of early adolescence, which would possibly be condescending and disempowering.

A mental image is a holistic, highly integrated form of knowledge. It is any unified, overarching mental representation that helps us work with a topic or subject (Schonmann, 2006: 93).

I realized I had been greatly influenced by the rise of the Ophelia culture initiated by Pipher et al in the mid-1990s and sustained by the North American media's confessional culture well into the first decade of the new millennium. *Ophelia* had become the authority I deferred to in matters early adolescent and female. Subsequent research into this literature left me troubled by what I saw as a potentially damaging image of the early adolescent girls being presented to the world as the norm. I was anxious that this image could have an insidious and ultimately disempowering effect on young women.⁵ As most of the research on early adolescent girls fueling the media applied to North American girls I was interested to know how the media's misrepresentation of girls was influencing South African girls' perception of themselves, and if this influenced their life expectations in anyway.⁶

In a survey conducted with a group of Grade 8 pupils after the visit to the school of a TYA production entitled *Defend a Friend* (May 2011) they rejected the production's representation of teenagers as being 'stupid' and 'stereotyped.' They claimed they often felt insulted by being portrayed as 'bratty and hormonal', 'immature' and 'promiscuous'. Some of the participants in the survey were offended by the way

⁵ The cultural backlash to the image of young woman as victim has been documented by feminist Ariel Levy who, in her book *Female Chauvinist Pigs*, cites it as the source of an equally damaging counter-cultural phenomenon she terms the 'rise of raunch' (Levy, 2005).

⁶ The portrayal of the early adolescent girl in crisis and concern for her well-being and future is not restricted to electronic and print media alone and it found its way into the feminist theatre texts of Britain in the late twentieth century, see Chapter Three.

teenage life is portrayed as being 'without responsibilities or commitments'. In response to questions about adults acting as teenagers, the participants said that the actors are too old, 'fake', 'the language, expressions, their like body language and gestures and stuff are so exaggerated.' This statement was countered by a learner who said, 'I think we have actually adopted the stereotypes' and another who said 'It's all stereotypes, but its Drama so how else would you get it across otherwise?'⁷

The Well Told Story

It is worthwhile to, at this point, unpack the theory that what makes for a good story in everyday life is not always successful in theatre. Erica Rosenfeld Halverson's 2008 study into report-ability and credibility in publicly performed narrative provided a useful framework, which helped me to shape the scaffold and provided the criteria groups needed to select pieces for inclusion in their projects. Halverson's study was rooted in the narrative analysis of personal experience theories of William Labov. In workshops conducted with Chicago based LGBTQ⁸ *About Face Youth Theatre* personal narratives were taken up and transformed into pieces for public performance. The final selection of the pieces rested within a report-ability continuum that balanced the individual storyteller's perspective whilst incorporating the voices of the community to which the individuals belonged (Halverson, 2008: 29). The study demonstrates how, in the dramaturgical process, narratives were transformed from highly reportable personal narratives, to highly credible generic adaptations, and finally to performances that result in the construction of positive, public identities that expose normality without sacrificing particularity. This process, Halverson argues, provides LGBTQ adolescents, who experience stigma in public contexts, with the opportunity to understand how they see themselves, how others see them, and how they fit these perspectives together into a more coherent sense of self (Halverson, 2008: 29).

The report-ability factor in personal storytelling is grounded in the feature(s) that mark a particular story as unique and worth telling. Every story has a viewpoint, which is the mark of the relationship between a storyteller and their story. A personal narrative is told only from the teller's point of view. What is of interest or appears

⁷ At the time of writing, the debate about misrepresentation of women and girls in the media continues, with the 2011 release of the award-winning documentary *Miss Representation*. Writer/Director Jennifer Siebel Newsom's film, with its 'you can't be what you can't see' message, interweaves stories from teenage girls with provocative interviews conducted with prominent North American women 'to give us an inside look at the media and its message'.

⁸ Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning.

most remarkable to the teller takes priority. The sensational nature of tell-able narratives, which are 'aesthetically dense and filled with human drama', often revolving around events such as death and sex and themes such as independence, naturally fit the tell-ability criterion, and generally cause listeners to pay attention.⁹

The reasons for telling a story may hold great significance for the teller but this does not automatically mean that it is suited to adaptation for a greater audience. In Halverson's study the resultant shift in viewpoint between the original narrative and the final script reflected the collective experience of the youth involved in the project and spoke in the voice of the group. Halverson suggests that the establishment of clear directives for the participants can assist with the selection of a story and then the best way to tell or enact the story. Telling, adapting and performing personal stories facilitates the construction of representations of personal narratives. The belief is that these narratives, which begin with highly reportable individual stories, become more credible community narratives as they are adapted into scripted scenes by the performance community. Ultimately the performance of the adaptations reaches a wider audience than the story in its original form is capable of doing. This technique is grounded in Corey and Goldman's argument that character is the central component of theatre for young audiences and their identification, which is a perceived relationship of the character to the self. The shift from one teller's voice to a voice that speaks from the collective experience is essential 'to awaken the empathy of the spectator' and is an important dramaturgical device which connects the audience to story in performance (Goldman in Schonmann, 2006: 84).

Christopher Worthman's 2002 study of devised performance conducted with the Teen Street Theatre for Teenagers in Chicago suggests that using multiple means such as writing, improvisation, movement, drama and music fostered engagement with and empathy for others' experiences and this enriched participants' own perspective-taking and voices. Out of his yearlong study a similarly 'blended' representation of adolescence emerged from what he refers to as the deconstruction of the 'ordinary lived experience' of the teenage participants. The subsequent

⁹ Ochs & Capps describe three ways in which narratives of personal experience are tell-able.

1. *The sequence of events, described in the narrative, are sensational.*
2. *The rhetorical devices used by the teller cause listeners to pay attention.*
3. *The events in the narrative are significant to the interlocutors.* (Ochs & Capps in Halverson, 2008: 33)

transformation of the stories that evolved from this process led to the production of 'new cultural items' and 'possible ways of looking at the world' (Worthman, 2002: 10).

In 2010, Taiwanese teaching artist Wan–Jung Wang conducted a study into the exploration of the aesthetics of an oral history performance project with graduate students in order to test the viability of including oral history performance into undergraduate courses. A particular aim of this project was to examine how training of this nature would expand the aesthetic possibilities of applied theatre practice (Wang, 2010: 563). Wang says that whilst all the memories excavated were explored on the floor, not all of them made it onto the stage, as they were not all suited to performance. The criteria she applies to the selection of stories is that they must hold interest for an audience or speak to a 'universal', thus stories about 'trivialities' and 'personal matters' were omitted. Wang explains that, as this was work undertaken in a performance class and not intended as therapy, the performers were urged to avoid memories that were distressing to them and were encouraged to tell stories that they had enough emotional distance from, so as to be able to tell them from a vantage point of emotional safety.

Wang was guided in what she identifies as the composition or configuration stage of the project i.e. the selection of stories for performance, by the narrative theories of French philosopher Paul Ricoeur who argued that narratives are symbolic representations of reality and that the rearrangement of the incidents in real life is in itself an aesthetic experience. Ricoeur's theories led Wang to conclude that 'the rearrangement of incidents that compose the dramatic plot' are 'a meaning-making process' too, thus 'the composition of each short scene constitutes both meaning and aesthetic quality'. What she describes as the 'emotional truth of a story' is more what emerges from the group's dialogical exchange and has less to do with the facts of the real events (Wang, 2010: 570).

Selecting the Stories for Performance

The cut refers to the overall proportions and symmetry in transforming a rough diamond to a polished diamond. These factors affect the brilliance and scintillation (fire) of a diamond. A well-cut diamond will reflect light internally from one mirror like facet to another, dispersing it through the top of the stone. Cuts that are too deep or too shallow lose or leak light through the side or bottom, affecting the diamond's brilliance (Rio Tinto Mining, 2009).

Selecting and adapting stories for performance storytelling is a lot like diamond sorting, first you have to recognize the story's theatrical potential and then you have

to cut and polish it to a gleaming object of beauty. The work produced by the Grade nine girls are the raw uncut diamonds and the processes their stories are about to pass through in the second workshop will transform them into performance¹⁰. This is where I aim to 'give back tenfold', specifically in the application of the metaphorical to the everyday, in the realization of a unique theatrical world in which the stories can take on a new life and in the crafting and creation of moments of beauty which draw an audience together into what performance theorist Jill Dolan calls a sense of *communitas*. Where,

...in a theatre event or a ritual [...] audiences or participants feel themselves become part of the whole in an organic, nearly spiritual way; spectators' individuality becomes finely attuned to those around them, and a cohesive if fleeting feeling of belonging to the group bathes the audience (Dolan in Chappell, 2005: 11).

¹⁰ The reader is requested to view the DVD material that accompanies this document and refer to Appendix Three for a detailed account of the workshop process. The final selection of stories was based on the overall aesthetic quality as well as the emotional impact of the monologues and practical issues such as sound quality.

Chapter Three –The Aesthetics of TYA

At the time of writing I am yet to begin the secondary process with the University of Cape Town drama students, I had hoped for a longer rehearsal period but the cast's availability is beyond my control and as a result I am in the position of pre-production planner to greater degree than I had originally anticipated. My influences, I fear, will bleed like Bluebeard's seeping key into the work and stain it with my sensibilities. At present slowly emerging images are caught in the tangled net of my consciousness and I am spending time unraveling, unpicking and examining the stories and images for their theatrical impact.

What emerges from my own personal history, along with the videotaped footage of the research group, will form the final production's skeleton, to which the flesh will be added in the secondary process I am planning to engage in with the students. The allocated space, *The Playroom* on the Hiddingh Campus of the University of Cape Town, is a black box lacking in technical resources. It offers a challenge as a theatre maker, one that I ironically believe is an age old feminine one, that of making the most out of a limited situation. As a National Heritage site there are many restrictions. Rather than forcing myself onto the space I have been 'listening' to it and it speaks of the ghosts of women past. Its architecture becomes the walls of a dormitory, its gloominess the shadow world conjoined with this one. In the creation of the final thesis production, *Limbo*, the supernatural becomes a point of departure. The title is deliberately ambiguous, it is a reference to Catholic theology¹ and so to the 'spiritual fate' of infants delivered to, and disposed of in secret by teen-mothers, and an acknowledgement of what Drew Chappell identifies as the state an audience of young people enters into when attending a performance

...even when not asked to take on the physical aspects of a character, young people still engage in embodiment. Observers, audience members, and attentive learners exist in a liminal state (Chappell, 2010: 9).

Matters of Propriety

Shifra Schonmann identifies the following as 'neglected subjects' in Theatre for Young People: sexuality, abuse, illness and death. She believes that this is indicative of the continuing desire to protect children's minds from bad influences and dismisses the notion that 'young people's minds should be left undisturbed until they are developed enough to face the complexities of real life situations' as 'pathetic and

¹ Our use of the word limbo to refer to states of oblivion, confinement, or transition is derived from the theological

futile in the current world we live in'. She encourages TYA practitioners to tackle 'difficult subjects' (Schonmann, 2011). My aim in the final installment of *The Fairy Godmother Project*, in an exploration of neonaticide, is to answer this call. The play is set in a girl's hostel in a small country town, where the girl's freedom and movements are heavily restricted. I am exploring lowering the ceiling of the space with a net to represent physical entrapment, the holes in the net acting as portholes to the supernatural. The net will be embellished with suspended objects that appear to be floating and represents my own consciousness, which I have put under scrutiny throughout this course of study and represented in an embodiment on the stage in each of the projects. The suspension of the net echoes the state of the girls in life, between childhood and adulthood. Oppressed by the institution during the week and expected to conform to its routines and codes; on the weekends the girls take liberties that are not otherwise permitted. A strong undercurrent of rebellion and subversion exists amongst them and in order to survive they escape into a fantasy world. This world is closely connected to fairy tales and represents the feminine subversion of the masculine.

Fairy Tales and Feminism

The Nest and *The Selkie* were both embedded in an aesthetic that drew its inspiration from fairy tales and folktales, acknowledging the interest I had developed in the feminist interpretations of fairy tales in recent years². Thanks to feminist scholars of the late twentieth century the reclamation of the subversive feminine origins of the stories and the subsequent toppling of Charles Perrault and the Brother's Grimm's 'ownership' of the tales opened a treasure chest of stories for reconsideration and reworking (Warner, 1994). Academics and writers began to explore the elements of subversion in the texts that arose out of the French literary movement dominated by women, in the period of 1690-1715. The texts are abundant in examples of feminine subversion: ranging from the characterization of the female, to explorations of feminine desire and sexuality and the image of motherhood. Marina Warner describes the tales as emancipatory and notes that

... many writers have hidden and hide under its guileless and apparently childish façade, have wrapped its cloak of unreality all around them; adopting its traditional formal simplicities they have attempted to challenge received ideas and raise questions into the minds of their audience: protest and fairy tale have long been associated (Warner, 1994: 411).

² The historic literary movement of the French *précieuses*, of writers such as Marie-Jeanne L'Héritier and Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy, had all but been forgotten by mid twentieth century academia until 'a fairy godmother of sorts appeared on the scene' in the form of feminist academics (Siefert in Haase, 2003: 53).

My fascination with fairy tales stems from a very young age. The oldest book I possess is a well-worn cloth bound version of the Grimm's Fairytales that I inherited from my mother as a child. Its gothic font, gruesome tales and woodcut illustrations with their cast of grotesques is the spring from which my creative imagination and aesthetic sensibility, I have come to realize, owes its origin. As a motherless child the tales offered me some of the wisdom I needed to navigate my way through life. They spoke of cruelty, mistreatment and desperate circumstances but always they offered hope of redemption. They spoke more often than not of girls and young women, who were brave and capable. They survived their enemies to emerge victorious, and of course there was always magic and it was this element that led me to understand that the stories were to be understood on a deeper and symbolic level.³

Teen fiction writer Francesca Lia Block, who describes her work as 'contemporary fairy tales with an edge' has taken the stories away from the forest and into gritty urban settings (Block, 2010). Block's use of language is poetic and her stories slip effortlessly between the real and the magical. What I particularly wish to convey to the audience in *Limbo* is what Block urges girls to do in her book *How To (Un)cage a Girl*

...choose to believe in your own myth, your own glamour, your own spell, a young woman who does this [...] has everything (Block, 2008).

The space between the mortal and faerie worlds continuously inspires me and I find to be appropriate to the aesthetics of *Limbo*, as Marina Warner argues

The time of ordeal through which the fairytale heroine passes can be seen to represent the liminal interval between childhood and maturity. They are tales of early adolescence, a time of physical transformation and with that a change of identity from girl to woman and that womanhood a commodity. Not ready to grow up or too ready to embrace adulthood (Warner, 1994: 219).

Elaine Aston in her 2003 study of contemporary English feminist playwrights identified an emerging concern for the girl child at risk, both as young mother and as infant. She provides evidence of this by referring to the large number of millennium plays focusing on teenage pregnancy, infanticide and postpartum psychosis. Aston identifies allegory, semi-autobiographical and confessional storytelling as popular theatrical forms employed by feminist playwrights to tell these stories and notes that many of these plays were underpinned with cautionary tales borrowed from

³ The pedagogical function of fairy tales is well documented and the reader is referred to Zipes, Bettelheim and Pinkola Estes for further exploration of this topic.

traditional folk and fairy tales (Aston 2003: 169). The darkest of these is *The Skriker*, Caryl Churchill's 1994 masterpiece of experimental feminist theatre. The malevolent spirit of the title pursues teenage runaways, Josie and Lily, from Lancaster to London. Josie, tricked by the Skriker, commits infanticide and Lily is hounded by the shape-shifter for the child she is carrying. In Churchill's portrayal of parallel worlds, it is the supernatural that has the most power and influence. The text is steeped in theatrical symbolism and the stream of consciousness dialogue spoken by the Skriker, made all the more disturbing juxtaposed against the naturalism of the teenager's speech, demands the audience's complete and full attention. This heady brew of feminist message, magical realism and theatrical symbolism; of a dark fairy tale told through a heightened text that casts a spell over its audience is what I, as a theatre maker, am most excited by and most attracted too. *Limbo* shall have some of the flavor of this brew. The storytelling will be heightened through the use of shadow puppetry, occult ritual and music. The configuration of the stories into performance will rely on the audience being plunged into sensory deprivation and overstimulation to create *communitas* and to heighten the audience's emotional responses to the text. It is hoped that they will at times feel physically disorientated and through this disorientation will experience catharsis. It is important to state that this catharsis is not intended to be instantaneous but it is hoped that at a later time perhaps the audience will recall elements of the play that will be of use to them.

From Instrument to Art

According to German Theatre Pedagogue Gabi dan Droste there are various reasons why children and young people differ from the adult audience and it is the duty of the theatre artist interested in working with young people to develop insight and understanding into these differences. The goal of this knowledge is to use theatrical forms, which enable interaction between the stage and the audience in a way that connects the young audience to the narrative process (dan Droste, 2005).

Theatre has the capacity to transform reality, to create a new world. It is a powerful artistic channel to elicit feelings of fear and pity, laughter and happiness. It is, therefore, worth probing the inner structures of the mechanism that arouses these profound emotions and what can be properly devised in theatre for young people to help in its struggle for a rightful status in society and a rightful status in the hierarchy of the theatre world (Schonmann, 2006: 2).

Shifra Schonmann is a staunch advocate for a shift from an instrumental to an aesthetic approach in theatre for young audiences. She insists that for TYA to grow as an art form it needs to develop poetic, aesthetic and artistic forms, unique unto

itself and not just be a 'watered down version of adult theatre' (Schonmann, 2005: 31). The onus, she argues, rests with theatre makers to create original works for the stage that elevate the aesthetic standard of TYA as well as continue the search for new theatrical forms that challenge preconceived ideas about appropriateness, respectability and the limited intellectual and emotional development of young people. According to Schonmann it is the very lack of academic research into areas such as forms and catharsis in TYA that has placed it in a state of creative limbo. Schonmann argues that the field, if it is to distance itself from formulaic cookie cutter productions and values, has to shift away from its purely educational function and from adaptations of children's literature texts, into an exploration of an aesthetic for young people and that this is only possible through the creation of performance texts that do more than just claim to be educational and age appropriate.

Emotional truth should be the central interest of the playwright. Condescension and oversimplification ruin the essence of the dramatic experience. Yet theatre for young people should be accessible to the child, to his ability to process the content and the feelings that it arouses (Schonmann, 2006: 85).

I would add that it is imperative that TYA actors are directed away from stereotyping the early adolescent experience and be made conscious of the issues surrounding misrepresentation. It follows that the theatre maker interested in making TYA work should have a sense of the possible limitations of the audience and yet have the sense to work against 'the habit of one track thinking' which ends in stagnation and is evident in what Schonmann terms kitsch theatre (Schonmann, 2006: 129). The term kitsch in this context refers to stale renditions of familiar and comfortable assumptions, associations and images often lavish in form, but holding little in the form of meaningful content. John Gilbert refers to kitsch theatre as the 'fast-food theatre' phenomenon, 'where the dressing frequently compensates for the blandness of the dish' (Gilbert, 2003: 108). Beauty, design and language are both important elements in how I make theatre. I am uncertain how these elements will be realized in *Limbo* but I am certain that I shall be attempting to explore beauty in the *misé en scene*, not as Gilbert suggests as an antidote to thought, but as an avenue to spirit and in this I am guided by the theories of James Thompson.

Beauty Matters

When we come upon beautiful things [...] they act like small tears in the surface of the world that pull us through to some vaster space (Scarry in Thompson, 2009: 136).

These days, she clung to each last shred of beauty. People thought beauty was bullshit, just a Band-Aid slapped over the abyss, but they couldn't be more wrong. [...] beauty mattered, it was the only thing that fed you when everything else turned to shit (Fitch, 2006).

There has recently been a revival of interest in and reclamation of Beauty in the Arts, the scope of which is beyond this study, so I shall mention only those theorists whose ideas are directly influencing the aesthetic choices I am making in the piece. James Thompson in his 2009 treatise on the shift in applied theatre practice from the effective to the affective, states his desired intention to 'realign, what is perceived as the proper place, time and form of 'applied theatre' so that the struggle for a beautiful ideal rediscovers the intimate correlation between the political and the aesthetic at its heart' (Thompson, 2009: 3). He encourages 'dynamic and joyful performance projects', which 'continue to make real everyone's right to beautiful, radiant things'.

Asking participants to create something they understand to be beautiful engages them in a quest that has powerful and potentially positive results (Thompson, 2009: 136).

By embracing the *affective*, he argues, the work has longer lasting and universalizing effect on both the audience and the performers. Thompson continues to argue that this often overlooked artistic element is precisely what applied theatre makers should consider when creating work. The lingering after effect of a play is primarily a result of how an audience has been emotionally affected during the performance. Jonathan Levy, in a reflection upon the pedagogy of theatre, espouses the theory that audience members observe themselves responding on an emotional level to the action on stage, and it is precisely in this recognition of an emotional response that theatre's power to educate lies; this, according to Levy, is the birthplace of empathy within the viewer. The emotional recall is what remains, albeit in a pale imprint, long after the details of the plot have become hazy. 'The real power of the theatre lies in our total experience of it before the mind begins to turn that experience into words' (Levy, 2005: 2).

The insistence on the moral message as being the *raison d'être* for making TYA,

...neglects the importance of other kinds of responses, such as in terms of spectacle and play, or the possibility that some element of the theatrical form itself may be the principal meaning of the performance (Bacon, 2010: 102).

Anthony Jackson cautions that work that 'aims to educate or influence can only truly do so if it values entertainment, the artistry and craftsmanship theatre associated with resonant, powerful theatre' (Jackson, 2005: 106). A shift from instrument to art, Thompson claims, results in an empowered audience who, through agitation at the level of sensation, are propelled by a demand to know more.

The true appeal and beauty of drama and theatre in education lies in its power to express the human mind and spirit via the captivating magic of theatre. [...] we are stifled by applied drama and theatre that have so often put real obstacles in the way of broadening the horizon of the field (of aesthetics) by its expansion of the utilitarian function of theatre in the curriculum and beyond (Schonmann, 2005: 38).

In the war torn communities Thompson has worked in, he notes any attempt to create something beautiful is an act of resistance, it is indicative of the human spirit's refusal to be vanquished.

In a world that can make us feel so inadequate in more ways than one, we can spring to life through those moments that welcome and make our spirits soar, where the sense of beauty intensifies our aliveness, our voice, a reason for living and often a caring need to want to protect such discoveries, to note its mood, revelation, destruction, harmony and light (Cannatella, 2006: 97).

Life after Limbo - Feedback and Follow Ups

Theatre for young people should always carry with it an element of hope for society's well-being (Schonmann, 2006: 49).

It is my hope that the work of the final thesis production will inspire girls in the audience to value their stories and, through seeing their stories staged, encourage them to explore theatre as a medium of expression. I am also hoping that the students in the cast will gain new skills from the exploration into playing younger characters. It would be interesting to take this aspect into another research process and examine it in greater depth. As this work is still in progress it is difficult to draw any conclusions as to what will occur. The project will require a follow up activity in the form of a post-performance event, which I plan to conduct within a day or two of the viewing and again a few months afterwards possibly in a different form. I shall ask audience members to fill in a questionnaire⁴ to ascertain the success or failure of the aesthetic elements of the piece and am planning to engage in a dialogue with the Grade Nine girls of the primary process after they have seen the show to record their responses to it. I shall embed myself in the audience during performances to gauge the audience's unguarded reactions, I believe this will help me to pinpoint exactly where I feel the audience pull away from, or engage more deeply with the piece.

⁴ See Appendix Four.

Conclusion

In conclusion, as I reflect upon the research journey through limbo to a point of clarity and understanding of self as an artist and, with regards to the ethical and aesthetic considerations of working with and for the early adolescent audience, I am left with many more questions. The study has merely scratched the surface of the research potential in the field of Theatre for Young Audiences as well as that of self- reflexive practice. Through the latter methodology I was able to place my own motivations under the microscope and have developed a new understanding of the importance of this scrutiny of self in relation to the subjects of the study. This has resulted in a shift of position in my practice yet there are still elements of my former practice that I retain in order to elevate the work to a point of aesthetic sophistication. This level was unattainable by the original participants and, in my experience as a director/designer, required by the second participants to guide the process and contain the work. I see my place, and the place of others interested in exploring new approaches to Theatre for Young Audiences, as that of a co-collaborator but ultimately as the guiding light through the liminal murky spaces of creativity towards a final product that reaches the greater audience.

As a TYA theatre maker, with my travails through limbo complete, I, like Sarah Woodson, am now

...totally out there with my politics and ethics – I can't go in with the romantic view of either a scholar or an artist who has a direct pipeline to God or a higher power and sees the world better than anyone else and doesn't need anyone else (Woodson 2003: 126).

At the outset of this project I, as an experienced theatre maker, wished to mentor the girls and to assist them in expressing themselves in their own voices in a work of aesthetic beauty. However after conducting workshops I decided that the best way to proceed would be to take the work into a secondary phase with drama students, so as to provide the early adolescents with an opportunity to see their work in a piece of theatre in which they could feel a sense of ownership and pride.

In the making of new TYA work whilst it may not always be possible to do empirical research I would strongly advise practitioners to do so whenever they can. Initially this paper was unable to examine the secondary process experienced with the University of Cape Town students, yet it has become a vital component of the research to do so and so I shall briefly analyze what transpired in the secondary

process. The four-week rehearsal period engaged in prior to the performance of *Limbo* at The Playroom initially concentrated primarily on character, this emphasis was in line with my concern with respectful representation in TYA. The characters emerged through games and director driven suggestions whilst I simultaneously devised the plot. In order to meet the production deadlines I provided the cast with an episodic breakdown of the plot. From this the cast was able to devise dialogue, in a secure narrative structure, which I came to realize for the purposes of artistic integrity had to be mine. The cast's contribution was thus mentored and monitored by me and in order to elevate the work from the rehearsal floor to the stage I now realize that I made most of the creative decisions. This understanding has led me to conclude that the work bears my stamp, my artistic mark is inescapable and the message mine and thus not a true reflection of the original participants interests, rather one which I, albeit subtly and persuasively, introduced to them.

The final scene of *Limbo*, is a theatrical manifestation of what my research intention was in the project. In the scene the actress who most resembles me in physical appearance carried the baby into the space, thus presenting the subject for inspection. The cast split into two groups, the smaller and younger characters at a table for cleansing down stage right and the taller and older characters positioned down stage left at a table set up for anointment. The space occupied by the actress carrying the baby was in the liminal between the two. Candles were lit across the front of the stage thus illuminating the darkness of the space and represented the new knowledge and awareness of a social problem that grew out of the working process. The actress carrying the baby held the baby out for washing whilst she incanted lines about the purification of the baby's body. She then caressed the baby, carried it across the space and gave it to the older girls for anointment. She watched as the baby was anointed and wrapped in preparation for placement into the vanity case casket. The younger characters joined the older ones around the table and the group laid their hands on the casket. If the character carrying the baby represents, as I now firmly believe she does, the researcher, the shifts in her position between the groups reflect the changes and adjustments made in the research journey for me as a TYA theatre maker. The final image of a light filled doorway which illuminated the ghost girl reunited with her baby represent the new understandings that have emerged from this study about my own practice, the nature of the TYA work and indicate a release from limbo.

I have come to accept that in this work my original impulse changed from working with girl's stories with the introduction of a topic that affected them and that ultimately I, as an adult, felt was important for them and the greater audience to think about. This primarily came about because the girl's I conducted the initial study with felt unable to articulate their stories and doubted that they had anything worthwhile to say. This possibly deems the original intention of the project null and void, yet I feel confident that the work gave a voice to the voiceless, represented by the baby and was inclusive of all the participants' contributions. The fieldwork undertaken in *The Fairy Godmother Project*, and the knowledge gained from it, proved invaluable to me and drove my aesthetic sensibilities further into the affective realm than I had previously ventured. The success of this has still to be assessed and a follow up discussion with the girls who came to see the show needs to be conducted. What further knowledge emerges from the follow up activities shall have to wait for another paper to be made known. As at the end of *Limbo*, the cast return to their dormitory beds whilst the audience files out of the space, life and the work continue. I hope that others interested in making TYA will gain from this self -study a new understanding of the complexity of the ethical considerations of the work and a sense of the creative possibilities in this rich and emerging field.

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Appendix One

Extract from South African Council of Educators Professional Code of Conduct.

CONDUCT: THE EDUCATOR AND THE LEARNER

1. An educator:
 - 1.1 respects the dignity, beliefs and constitutional rights of learners and in particular children, which includes the right to privacy and confidentiality;
 - 1.2 acknowledges the uniqueness, individuality, and specific needs of each learner, guiding and encouraging each to realise his or her potentialities;
 - 1.3 strives to enable learners to develop a set of values consistent with the fundamental rights contained in the Constitution of South Africa;
 - 1.4 exercises authority with compassion;
 - 1.5 avoids any form of humiliation, and refrains from any form of abuse, physical or psychological;
 - 1.6 refrains from improper physical contact with learners;
 - 1.7 promotes gender equality;
 - 1.8 refrains from any form of sexual harassment (physical or otherwise) of learners;
 - 1.9 refrains from any form of sexual relationship with learners at a school;
 - 1.10 uses appropriate language and behaviour in his or her interaction with learners, and acts in such a way as to elicit respect from the learners;
 - 1.11 takes reasonable steps to ensure the safety of the learner;
 - 1.12 does not abuse the position he or she holds for financial, political or personal gain;
 - 1.13 is not negligent or indolent in the performance of his or her professional duties; and
 - 1.14 recognises, where appropriate, learners as partners in education.

CONDUCT: THE EDUCATOR AND THE COMMUNITY

2. An educator:
 - 2.1 recognises that an educational institution serves the community, and therefore acknowledges that there will be differing customs, codes and beliefs in the community; and
 - 2.2 conducts him/herself in a manner that does not show disrespect to the values, customs and norms of the community.

Appendix Two

Extracted from Hazel Barnes Mapping ethics in applied drama and theatre in *Acting on HIV: using drama to create possibilities for change*. Edited by Dennis Francis (in publication 2011).

Ethics Declaration

The Ethics working group considered that the following issues should be given serious attention by all practitioners of applied drama at all stages of the process of intervention:

1. It is accepted that ethical principles as expressed through Human Rights declarations are fundamental to all research and intervention, but that their expression and lived experience is contingent and context bound.
2. There should be acknowledgement of the ideological basis of applied drama and theatre as embedded in Freirean principles of dialogue and empowerment, with the concomitant ethical principles.
3. It is recognised that applied drama interventions may have unequal power implications; practitioners should establish a spirit of mutual respect among all parties involved and all participants in the intervention should follow the principle of doing no harm.
4. There should be transparency about the purposes, intentions and methodology of the research/intervention wherever possible.
5. At all stages the participants' informed consent must be negotiated and a spirit of reciprocity and respect amongst all parties should be established.
6. There should be respect for intellectual property of and by all parties.
7. Practitioners should ensure that the research and intervention are culturally sensitive.
8. The results of the research should be returned to the community.
9. The benefits of the research should be shared with the community.

Appendix Three – The Workshop

In the executing of the workshops I found the Howell and Heap dynamic model for process drama to be useful. The use of the metaphor of the spiral allows for a more meaningful contemplation of the development of the work. Their process is broken down into the following

- Pauses
- Hesitations
- Re-consideration
- Difference of opinion
- Renegotiation
- Chance discovery
- Substitution
- Adjustment

Added to this I subsequently adopted, in order to build confidence and raise their opinions of themselves and their own stories, an approach loosely constructed upon the four-step methodology developed by Kathleen Gallagher in her yearlong in-classroom project with early adolescent Canadian girls, the which resulted in the book *Drama Education in the Life of Girls, Imagining Possibilities*. Gallagher's model used narratives about girls derived from various sources to engage in a process that shifts learning in the drama class from an expressive learning experience to a collective process in order to facilitate personal development (Gallagher 200:46). Following Gallagher's example, the workshops began by using a combination of literary and theatrical conventions such as 'a day in the life', 'letter writing' and 'still images' and participants were encouraged to make the stories more credible by adding details to the received stories that would personalize them. Gallagher's starting point, the story of Mary Morgan, recalls the life of a poor girl who, when impregnated by the son of the household where she was employed, conceals the pregnancy and kills her baby at birth. This story I sensed might hold particular resonance for the girls as there has been a baby safe recently opened in the area which encouraged mothers to place their unwanted children in the safe instead of abandoning them or killing them outright (Tabletalk, May 2011). The links to girls in the past made this a universal theme that I felt worth exploring and the groups began by examining current print media stories about the recent occurrences of 'Drain Babies' in Cape Town.

Both groups welcomed the shift away from stories of the self, to a concern with others. One group elected to focus on neonaticide, and they continued to explore stories about South African teen mothers who dispose of bodies of their newborns. The second group decided to look to the future, and their work revolved around the dreams they have as mothers of the future for their daughters at fifteen.

Both groups began by writing monologues that explored a multitude of perspectives in an attempt to, as a whole, encapsulate a collective adolescent response to the issues. The

monologue project is inspired by the work of UK based M6 Theatre Company in. M6, as well as performing full length productions, tours with a series of monologues that present the TYP audience with a choice, a dilemma, a secret revealed, which acts as a 'springboard into a dynamic interactive workshop led by an experienced facilitator' (Sumison, 2008:67). The girls were encouraged to explore ways to perform the monologues that will make them individual, unique and original. They used film, dance, poetry and song to tell the stories. It was decided by the first group that no one should portray a teen mother who commits neonaticide, as they felt this was beyond their experience and they didn't feel equipped or comfortable with playing that role. For the most part, the girls were engaging in a process of shifting their opinions about the issues.

This life change () occurs as we take into our own being the experiences of others and realize that not everyone sees the world as we do. As we look critically at ourselves, and our complicity in situations that position people as 'other', we are moved to imagine that the world could be otherwise. (Samson, 2005:70).

The decision to film the work came from the girls themselves, they felt that it would be easier to add aesthetic elements and felt a live performance would have limited them. They took the decision to avoid the 'It could have been so much better' melancholia by changing the medium and I was quite happy for them to do so. Some of the films include a blooper track, which I believe are the girl's attempts to balance out the seriousness of the subject matter with humor. This shading of light and dark elements is an important part of the piece and one that I plan to take into the final production's aesthetic.

I opened the floor as facilitator by presenting the project to the girls, explaining what my intention as researcher and theatre maker and ascertaining their interest. I recorded each session in a journal. What follows is a summarized account of each session. Quotation marks indicate the speech of the girls, I have not identified individuals in the group as per their request for anonymity.

Session One.

After establishing the environment of trust by setting the ground rules for collaboration and respect. The girls expressed concerns about confidentiality, past trauma and vulnerability as well as the fear of being judged by their peers, some confessed to being uncomfortable with both sharing and hearing confessional type stories. The girl on girl competition was debated and when asked to describe it and its effects the girls said it was about 'who is the best, and what makes you the best'. They defined best as 'wearing the best clothes', 'having the best body shape and face' and they said that it was all to 'get the guys attention'. Some disputed this and said 'No, it's for each other, guys don't notice' and they laughed and agreed. One participant gave the example of her mother who always asks her father's opinion on new garments, returning them if her father doesn't like them. 'I say to her but mommy it looks good but she always takes it back'. I introduced through the discussion clothes the topic of intergenerational fashion, which led into the subject of corsets, foot binding and body

modification. Corsets were alternately described as 'cages' and 'sexy' and the wearing of underwear as outerwear, as empowering and suggestive. This led into improvisations about 'how far would you go to look good?' and some girls decided to do a 'through the ages thing.'
Homework Task: Participants were to conduct research by asking their mothers and grandmother what their experience of early adolescence was like.

Session Two.

This group continued the discussion on clothes 'You gotta get the dress, which flatters you. If it doesn't then the boy will not notice you and get to know you for who you are, you have to get the dress first'. They described the reduction of the female body to its parts and their frustration with the 'ratio system' by which a girl could be measured according to those parts in their society. 'Good legs, great hair, good body, nice hands'. A few of the girls told stories about their mothers and grandmothers but interestingly always in relation to their fathers and grandfathers - 'My grandmother didn't want to get married so young but my grandfather came along and stole her and married her and that was that.'

Session Three.

Bonding - exploring and finding commonality within the group.

In this session girls were encouraged to form smaller groups of their own choice, I was interested to see the cliques operating in the group. They were given tasks with time limits, which they executed with varying degrees of success. The performers in the groups tended to take over with the others following their lead.

- Task one – Who are you - select a group name that lets audience know you are a group of girls with girl's interests at heart in 5mins.
- Task two – Whatcha wanna say - War Cry – Work out a war cry that establishes who you are and what you're all about for audience in 5mins.
- Task three – How you gonna say it Girl? Move it – Choreograph a movement sequence to go with your war cry in 10 mins.
- Presentations of the integrated tasks in 20 mins.

Group One's presented the following

- Rebel-licious, with the motto 'I ain't sleazy, I ain't easy.' The dance sequence was of a combination of bump 'n grind and hip hop style moves. This was very much in the ilk of Levy's raunch culture and the influence of the contemporary pop music industry in the style of dance was apparent.
- Red Roses, who adapted the nursery rhyme Ring o' Rosie, displayed a more child like imagination and a strong identity with their younger selves.
- Girls Gone Wild – similar dance moves to Rebel-licious
- G Squad – very high energy dancing, very smiley, in the motto they described themselves as the cool kids.

In the second group the same influences were apparent, it was obvious that most of the girls were attempting to emulate the image of women they see in music videos. One group was

more daring and their antics provoked much hilarity from audience particularly when the girls impersonated the men in a dance sequence by making a finger phallus which wriggled when they jumped. From this session I concluded that popular culture formed a bridge of commonality across the multiculturalism of the group.

Session Four and Five

Beginning with some blindfold trust exercises as a warm up, in this session I asked the girls to explore personal storytelling, the topic for this was *The Most Rebellious Thing I Have Ever Done*. I told them a personal story of my own teenage rebellion after which I asked them to focus on the following points:

- What is the most rebellious thing they have ever done?
- How did it make them feel doing it? And afterwards
- What happened as a consequence of this rebellious act?
- Who or what were they rebelling against?

The stories that came from this enquiry all had collusion at their core. Being together gave them a feeling of 'strength', 'fun' and 'adventure... in the moment.' The spontaneous decisions and the immediacy of the act made them buoyant. Some took decisions to 'face the fear of the consequences' later which included feelings of regret, guilt (amongst comrades) and anxiety (alone). The actions of rebellion and the anticipation of disclosure of covert activities such as shoplifting, getting alcohol for themselves and for boys, smoking, vandalism, bunking class – were all described as an attempt to assert their independence. They commented on the power of parental consent as having a deflating effect, no danger of getting caught meant not excitement. For homework the girls were asked to write down their stories in the first person.

Session 6

The written stories were collected and shared between the groups, thus ownership was removed and girls were encouraged to view the documents as having been received from an anonymous pen-pal who was sharing secrets with them. This idea was drawn from Noel Grieg's intercultural creative theatre making exchange, *Contacting the World*, in which he facilitated an exchange between youth theatre groups in various countries as a form of creative collaboration (Grieg, 2008). In a sense, by swapping the groups stories they were entering into a similar dialogue as Grieg's global participants and I hoped that this microcosmic sharing would open the participants to further creative opportunities. This also gave me an opportunity to unpack and explain the secondary process I intended conducting with the UCT drama students, which would further expand the stories into a theatre text. Whilst the process with the students may well borrow from this work, I explained, no one would be able to claim individual ownership of the stories but they would recognize themselves and others in the text in a way that made them proud of themselves.

Session 7

This session occurred on the same day as the Royal Wedding of Prince William to Kate Middleton. I saw this as an opportunity to talk about fairy tales and the expectation of happily

ever after. It was a fascinating session the girls were excited that they were allowed to watch the event and eager to do so. They were consumed by the details of the event, they recited the story of the royal couple's relationship with authority; how they met, how long they had been a couple, the details of the commoner status of the bride which they saw as a point of connection to them. What was fascinating was the amount of detail they went into in their dissection of hats, dresses, shoes, bags, hair styles and make up of the female wedding guests. They offered virtually no comment on the male guests apart from David Beckham. They gushed over the smallest bridesmaid and everyone had an opinion on every aspect of the bride's dress, tiara etc. They showed no interest in the solemn aspects of the ceremony but were very attentive in the vows and disappointed that there was no kiss in the church. The aesthetics of the event was what held the most importance for the girls.

Session 8

I begin the class by saying that we are moving away from the happy ending of the last session to a darker side of life and without any further introduction I begin the class by reading an article from local community paper newspaper clipping about infanticide. They are silent and very focused throughout the short reading and when I had finished reading they are visibly shaken by the story. A few murmurs arose from the group 'Its' disgusting', 'its not right', 'Why didn't she just have an abortion?' 'Why didn't she give it up for adoption?' 'How come her parents didn't notice?' 'I can't believe they didn't, what? Suddenly she's like, huge, and they don't see it?' They grew increasingly vocal and outraged by the story. One of the participants suggested that as they didn't 'know anything about this how can we relate to it?' I suggested that they attempt to work through their imaginations, and referred to other parts they had performed in in the previous quarter, where they had played characters beyond their personal experience and suggested they might think of this work in the same way. This was a 'bad girl' story, covert hidden dark side of the feminine that could go against nature and kill her baby. Some mentioned the film Juno, the story of a very well adjusted teenager and her pregnancy, her family and the adoptive parents she is having the baby for. Of all the characters in the film Juno seems the most level-headed and in control – we discuss if this provides a good role model for girls? I asked the class to consider that many of the girls in question are around the same age as them.

We discuss the mock-(doc)umentary form of storytelling and I offer suggestions to the group based on Kathleen Gallagher's day in the life exercise (Gallagher, 2001:45). None of the girls claimed to have read about this in any work of fiction they have read. I made some suggestions and handed out a reading pack for them to study before the next session, which is comprised of newspaper clippings and teen fiction suggestions.

They discuss characterization before the session ends and decided that they may want to research 'what to do if it happens' and 'how adults can help'. I suggest that they think about performing as girls who know the pregnant girl and are about the age they are now i.e. 14 or 15. Just before the session ends one girl told the group about her 17 year old cousin who had her first child at 15 after falling pregnant at 14, her father is a pastor and very strict.

Session 9

One of the girl's entered the session in a state of excitement, she had read in the local community paper that a baby safe had just opened in the area for unwanted newborn babies. Mothers were being encouraged to place their babies in the secure baby safe where they will be collected within minutes of being dropped off. The girl said that she was very proud to have an opinion on this after the previous session and that it was the first time anything in the paper that wasn't related to a school event had held any relevance for her.

One of the girl's said that her father thought the whole theme was inappropriate, when I asked if she agreed with her father she replied that once she had time to think about it, and read the stories, she decided it was a teenage issue so in a way she felt she owns it. The group decided no-one would portray the teen mom as no-one felt able to truly imagine what it must feel like to be in the situation. We discussed accountability, friendship, peer pressure as well as techniques for writing a dramatic monologue. It was decided that everyone would play someone who either knew the girl or knew of her through school. They decided to focus on relationships and the dilemma of suspecting/ knowing your friend was pregnant but feeling helpless and no knowing how to help or what to do.

The second group decided to explore the issue from another angle, that of what dreams they have are for their daughters at 15. These monologues became deeply personal and there was a greater sense of connection for the most part to what they were saying. The girls were asked to work to Penny Bundy's problem solving approach by stating what the scene had to accomplish and how this might be done.

TABLE II. An example of the problem solving approach used to create the action

Scene title:	Sitting In My Bedroom With The Door Shut Tight
What the scene must accomplish:	Reveal the private feelings of the girls
How the scene might be accomplished	Use of monologue and private but shared ritual, which draws on and reflects a concept from the concept maps. Lock them into their individual spaces

(Bundy, 2003:175)

Sessions 10 – 18

I held consultations with small groups in an attempt to assist them both with the rough drafts of their monologues and the flow / links between them. Some groups had a clear sense of aesthetic tools that could link the pieces e.g. music very important, a baby doll, the continuity of fast motion from one scene to another, you tube postings, cell phones ringing etc.

Then I worked with individuals and looked at including some of their interests into the monologues for example a dancer used dance to show a parental argument, abstracting it a dance. The texts were multi-lingual Xhosa, French, Arabic, Afrikaans and English. The settings were in their bedrooms, in parks, in a shopping mall, on a beach, in a girl's bathroom, a hair salon, a back garden, a dining room or around the school building. Places that teenage girls could easily access and that described her geographical world, her safe environment.

Session 19-20

The girls were invited to see each other's work. They exclaimed that they felt reassured by the exclusivity of the audience as they had all been through the process together and knew what it had entailed and they were scared that they would be judged by their peers from different grades. They especially did not want the boys of their grade to view their work, even though the boys had tackled similar themes in their classes, producing videos of their own, the girls felt however that the boys lacked maturity and they would be teased if their work was misinterpreted which they suspected it might be. I questioned whether they were still prepared to let the students see the work and they said 'Oh yes, it's OK they don't know us.'

Of the two projects, the latter, the forward-looking projection, both the girls and I felt was more successful. The viewing of this work was a very emotional experience for the girls as they spoke candidly in the monologues about loss, fear of rape, violence, daily sexual harassment, crime, disease and the difficulties of being a teenager. Many of the stories provided a cathartic experience and touched a number of the girls deeply, they cried openly and hugged each other. They, and I, realized that the experience not only of working together in groups but of hearing their stories had brought them closer together. I felt that this part of the process was a tremendous success, as individuals they grew and now it was up to me to take this work into a secondary process, to do the work justice I had a responsibility to do develop it aesthetically without losing the emotional impact of the original tellers. They were very excited about the UCT drama students viewing and using their work and about the idea of developing it into a play, which they could go and see. It is hoped they shall be able to attend on the opening night and shall complete questionnaires and engage in follow up discussions after the event.

Appendix Four

Post Production Questionnaire.

An index for the evaluation of theatre performances.

Title of the play: _____

Circle your response: Student in Grade 7 /Grade 8 /Grade 9.

	Check the column that best suits your response to the following statements	Not at all	Barely	Reasonably	Very Much	Absolutely
1	Did you enjoy the play					
2	Did the play lead you to use your imagination?					
3	Were the themes of the play relevant to your life?					
4	Did you understand the play?					
5	How clear were the words spoken on stage?					
6	Did the music contribute to creating an emotional response?					
7	Did the stage setting help you understand where the scenes took place?					
8	Did you find the scenery aesthetically pleasing?					
9	Did the costumes help you understand characters?					
10	Were the costumes well designed?					
11	Did the lighting add to the play?					
12	Did all the visual aspects come together aesthetically?					
13	Did you find the actor's acting convincing?					
14	Did you like the director's work?					
15	As a spectator, were you moved by the play?					
16	Did the play have weaker moments?					
17	Were you bored at times?					
18	Do you feel that the actors worked as a team on stage?					
19	As a spectator, was the play intellectually enriching?					
20	Did the play provide an aesthetic- artistic experience?					
21	Did you like the play overall?					
22	Would you recommend this play to your friends?					

Add any comments you wish in the space below:

(Schonmann, 2006:140)

Appendix Five.

Production Photographs.

***THE SELKIE* – Minor Project, May 2010, Room 315 Rosedale, University of Cape Town.**



Fig 1: Edmund Dulac illustration of the Fairy Godmother in *Cinderella*



Fig 2: Self as storytelling Fairy Godmother in *The Selkie*.

**THE NEST – Medium Project, November 2010, The Intimate Theatre
University of Cape Town.**



Fig 3: Anna receives instruction from her Fairy Godmother.



Fig 4: The Girls at the moment of realization that their souls are held captive by the Blue Crane Queen in the cupboard.

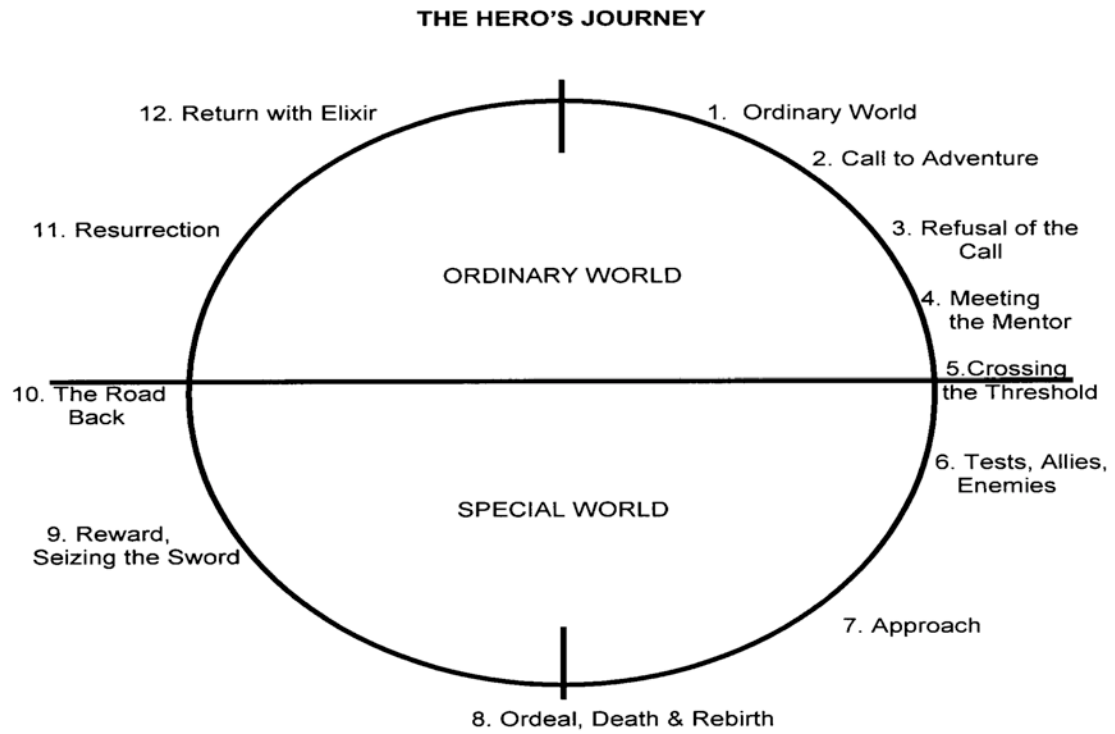
UNMARKED – Solo Performance Piece, March 2011, The Playroom, University of Cape Town.



Fig 5: Self as Aggy, the washer of corpses.

University of Cape Town

Appendix 6



(Vogelmann, 1985)