The Art of Living in Prison: The poetics of renewal in an applied theatre program with women prisoners

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Abstract

In 2010 I delivered a drama program for women prisoners at Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre (BWCC), which culminated in a performance for prisoners and staff. The program, Living Stories, drew from a range of drama approaches and strategies including image theatre, drama therapy, text-based work, improvisation games, drama skills development and process drama, finally touching on group devised performance. This program formed the basis for my doctoral study, in which I initially aimed to explore how drama might be a positive activity for women in this context, and to discover what drama approaches would engage them. The study is therefore an example of arts-based, practice-based qualitative enquiry in the fields of applied theatre and prison theatre. One of my key concerns was to find a way of integrating the aesthetic with the instrumental, rather than importing models from outside the art form of drama (for example, rehabilitation theory) to explore its transformative or ameliorative potentials. This led me to develop a pragmatist aesthetic frame through which to view and analyse the experience of Living Stories, influenced significantly by John Dewey’s (1934) *Art as Experience*, and the narrative theory of Jerome Bruner (see 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004). Shusterman’s (2000a, 2000b, 2008b) theory of *somaesthetics* also informed my analysis of the embodied nature of aesthetic experience in the project.

Through integrating these theories, I articulated four interdependent principles that I believe lie at the heart of aesthetic experience and engagement in applied theatre: *the art of knowing, the art of participation, the art of process and the art of living*; and I used these to guide my exploration. I also focused on the notion of *renewal*: a poetic (and at times aesthetic) term that described the rhythmic expansion of self and world through the creative process. Exploring Living Stories as an example of the art of living in applied theatre, this thesis addresses the question: *In Living Stories, what was the nature of the women’s engagement and the potential for movement towards personal and cultural renewal?* Within this overarching question, I have gained a deeper understanding of the poetics of self- and world-creation and renewal within the process; explored how emotion, spontaneity, narrative and role informed these poetics; and analysed the key tensions and rhythms that underpinned the experience of Living Stories. This thesis represents the articulation of a prison theatre experience using an aesthetic theory that has been developed and refined through an analysis of
the practice. It therefore brings depth and complexity to the frequently professed, but little analysed humanising and transformative potentials of prison theatre.

My overarching conclusion is that personal and cultural renewal in prison theatre is a complex process that is driven by a vital rhythm between habit and innovation. Renewal in Living Stories was dependent upon the participants having an opportunity to exercise their habitual roles and narratives across all frames, and revise these through somaesthetic engagement and spontaneity, towards innovation. This existed as a necessary tension that underpinned the poetics of self- and world-creation in this context, and it did not always result in renewal. It was therefore not as simple as creating new narratives, experimenting with new roles, trying something new, or showing a new (better) side of oneself. Nor was it necessarily a positive and harmonious undertaking that led towards absolute goodness. A significant aspect of renewal also appeared to involve the embodied exploration of the emotional complexity that exists within the art of process. This emotional complexity is reflected in the doing and undergoing of emotion that exists in metaxis, but also in the operation of emotion as a searchlight in the creative process. Within this, somatic and somaesthetic engagement is vital for participants in order for them to create aesthetically satisfying performance products, but also for them to achieve a heightened and ameliorative process of making. The story that I have told here is accompanied by the constant drumming of the integrative tensions and rhythms that underpin aesthetic experience, and is also an account of how the group engaged with those tensions and rhythms.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed) _______________________________ / ___ /2015

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Relevant Research Outputs

Articles


Conference Presentations


Introduction

Worst-case scenario: this thesis is a formaldehyde-filled jar against whose glass is pressed the dynamic flow of experience made static and pale. Best-case scenario: it is a shrine, littered with artefacts, trinkets, snippets of poetry and melted wax that somehow speak to the complexity of a series of moments now past. Either way, like all arts-based research, it represents a tension: to capture something ephemeral and pin it down in order to generate “knowledge” – to expose and extrapolate the profound human knowing that lives inside experience and art. In this case, I am trying to capture my own and others’ experiences of an applied theatre program that I delivered inside a women’s prison. This introduction sits outside a detailed aesthetic frame that I will establish in Chapter 1 and is therefore somewhat dry and functional, designed to position the work and give some background into how and why it came about. In this section, I will describe my position as a practitioner, and detail some of the initial aims for the research. I will also give a brief description of the background and context in terms of the wider correctional landscape, and the specific site of my study, Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre, with the understanding that more detailed analysis of the field, and descriptions of the people and context will follow in the body of the thesis as informed by my aesthetic frame. The project is as much a reflective practitioner account as an exercise in pragmatist aesthetics – an articulation of the poetic and aesthetic implications of a prison theatre experience. As such, the thesis represents my attempt to describe an unfolding process of integration between theory and practice, between self-discovery and other-discovery, between experience and expression, between life and art.

The words I’ve written... are just a veneer. There are truths that lie beneath the surface of the words - truths that rise up without warning like the humps of a sea monster, and then disappear. (Cave, 2014)

My Position

I will start by describing myself as an applied theatre practitioner, and this as a study that is situated in one of its significant disciplinary areas, prison theatre. Starting here already raises a number of questions and tensions that can be teased out to offer some background to my project. My practice began during the mid-1990s, over 30 years after Augusto Boal (1985), Dorothy Heathcote (Wagner, 1976) and John O'Toole
(1992) — seminal practitioners who had come through the 1960s counter-culture movement that was influenced by feminism, socialism and alternative approaches to education proposed by Freire (1972). I also began the work over a decade later than those who were struggling against the economic rationalism and conservative politics of the United Kingdom in the 1980s (see Kershaw, 1992; Thompson, 2003). By the 1990s in Australia and the United Kingdom, the application of theatre for social purposes had become a far less radical undertaking. The work was funded and endorsed by government and non-government organisations (in the UK at least), and had become what Thompson describes as “firmly established” (p. 13). Coming out of a broad theatre degree program, I worked in community-based theatre, theatre in education and theatre for young people for several years before moving to the UK and taking a full-time position with the well-established Geese Theatre Company. In Geese, I was trained in their very particular hybrid approach, using techniques that drew on Theatre of the Oppressed, theatre in education, mask, clown, psychodrama, drama therapy and other experiential group processes in order to work within the criminal justice system (see Baim, Brookes, & Mountford, 2002; Bottoms, 2010; Watson, 2009). After this, I returned to Australia and began combining practice with research in the Moving On project, working with adult survivors of institutional abuse and trauma, alongside a team of counsellors and other practitioners to create a testimonial performance, Memoirs of the Forgotten Ones (see Bundy, 2006b; Woodland, 2009). I also ran my own community-based projects with at-risk young people and refugees. Over the course of my career, I have undertaken an internship in Rio de Janeiro with Heritage’s (2004a, 2004b) People’s Palace Projects, participated in short courses in drama therapy, Theatre of the Oppressed, clown and mask, and pursued my enduring love of writing and performing music. I list all of these experiences here to illustrate the eclecticism of my work in the field, which I am certain is shared by many practitioners who are now somewhat controversially gathered under the umbrella of applied theatre (see Ackroyd, 2000, 2007; Balfour, 2009; Nicholson, 2005; O’Connor & Anderson, 2015; Prendergast & Saxton, 2009; Shaughnessy, 2012; P. Taylor, 2003).

Perhaps because of when I began, and the pathway I have taken through the practice, I am reasonably comfortable with the term. Ever since I began studying and working in the theatre, it has reflected Prendergast and Saxton (2009) and Shaughnessy’s (2012) descriptions of applied theatre, largely taking place outside of mainstream theatre buildings and intentionally applied for some kind of social
purpose. I have never found myself working in what Nicholson (2005), Shaughnessy, and G. White (2015) have acknowledged is problematically seen by some as “pure” theatre. Yet I have always been conscious of the tension between artistry and instrumentalism that defines the field, and found myself leaning further one way or the other depending on the particular context or project. It was my work with Geese that ignited my fascination with prison theatre, which has become a key disciplinary area within applied theatre, itself holding a diverse range of practices within its scope (see Balfour, 2004; Shailor, 2011; Thompson, 1998; Tocci, 2007). Geese’s work held a very strong instrumental focus and was rigorously framed by theories from psychology and criminology (Baim et al., 2002; Watson, 2009). My later work with Moving On was similarly informed by theories from counselling, social work and trauma therapy, but also falling within testimonial, reminiscence, documentary and verbatim forms of theatre (Bundy, 2006b; Woodland, 2009). These two formative experiences influenced my approach to this project, and formed the basis for the theory and practice that I will describe in more detail throughout the body of the work.

The range of approaches that inform my practice has oriented my use of particular terms in this study. In all of my previous work, and my approach to this project, there has been an acknowledgement of the importance of the process as well as the products of drama and performance-making. Despite their titles, applied theatre and prison theatre theory embrace the process-product continuum and commonly interchange the terms theatre and drama. I will therefore similarly use the term theatre in this broader sense, and I follow Nicholson (2005) in not wishing to invite any particular controversy or debate over this choice. Because of the range of therapeutic approaches that inform my practice and this study, I will use phrases like therapeutic forms of drama to capture forms such as psychodrama and drama therapy as defined by Blatter (2000), Emunah (1994), Jennings (1995), Landy (2001), Moreno (1975) and Scheiffele (1997); but also work like Boal’s (1995) Rainbow of Desire, Geese Theatre Company’s hybrid approach (see Baim et al., 2002; Watson, 2009), the use of therapeutic enactment in Balfour, Westwood and Buchanan’s (2014) Difficult Return project with returned military personnel, and the Moving On project (see Bundy, 2006b; Woodland, 2009). These might sometimes fall outside of the fields of drama therapy and psychodrama but still be seen as therapeutic. As my background has been in a range of applied forms, I will refer to the women as participants rather than the percipients of drama in education (see G. M. Bolton, 1984; O’Toole, 1992) or the
offenders of Geese's more behaviour-oriented rehabilitative work. This project represents a deliberate shift on my part away from this more narrow view of the women inside the prison. I will also distinguish between the participants as those women who participated in the practical drama workshop program as well as the research element of the study, and the staff members who augmented the research through their participation in consultation and interviews. At no point were staff members present during the workshop program, and therefore the group will refer to the group of women who participated, and myself as a member of that group. For reasons of confidentiality and research ethics, I have re-named all of the staff and participants in this project, a tension that I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3. I will use the term practitioner to encompass the combined artistry, facilitation and research elements of my role, but at other times I will use the word facilitator or researcher to indicate the particular functions of the role that I was undertaking at the time.

Aims and Scope

The initial impetus for my project was to explore how applied theatre might contribute to correctional programming in Australia where, as I will describe in Chapter 2, the work is rare and/or rarely documented. After my involvement with Geese, and my subsequent work with Moving On, I was also interested in the potential for my applied theatre practice in corrections to move away from an explicitly rehabilitative agenda. This interest was spurred on by Thompson's (2001) call for a “break in prison theatre practice”; Hughes' (2005) call for a return to “arts-specific models of change” in arts in corrections; Heritage's (2004a, 2004b) holistic approach to human rights in Brazilian prisons; and the emerging doubt over whether criminogenic approaches to rehabilitation are appropriate, particularly with women (see Howells, Heseltine, Sarre, Davey, & Day, 2004; Sorbello, Eccleston, Ward, & Jones, 2002). These theoretical threads will be teased out in more detail below and in the Literature Review (Chapter 2), but they initially led me to wonder whether applied theatre could empower participants in the articulation of their own versions of rehabilitation, transformation or positive change, rather than imposing an external agenda for reform. As I will describe in Chapter 3, once my study was underway, these ideals shifted as the women responded, the practice evolved, my theoretical view expanded, and the limitations and challenges of the context emerged. However, the underlying aims for the study essentially remained stable: to navigate and articulate my already changing approach to the context – from seeing the participants...
as offenders to seeing them as artists; and to explore how they engaged and responded to a range of different drama forms and performance approaches.

In order to pursue these aims, I targeted the Brisbane Women's Correctional Centre (BWCC) and offered to run a drama program in the centre over 23 two-hour sessions beginning in February 2011. The choice of BWCC was based solely on the fact that it was easy for me to travel there, and that the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble's Shakespeare Prison Project was already up and running in the men's prison (Borallon Correctional Centre) (see Heard, Mutch, Fitzgerald, & Pensalfini, 2013). After I made an initial approach to the centre via email, I was fortunate to secure a meeting with the General Manager. Also present was the Education Officer, whom I have named Helen, along with one of her colleagues, and a staff member from Psychology. In the meeting, I described my previous experience with Geese Theatre Company, and my own aims for the doctoral study. These staff and management were extremely keen and supportive, however, it took a full year to get the program up and running, as I was also required to submit a detailed and extensive application to the Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) Research Committee, the tensions of which will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 3. This application was in addition to the university ethical approval process (see Appendix A).

I named my program Living Stories Drama and advertised it using a poster that described, "Fun and laughter, drama games, group activities, confidence, communication, stories, creativity, sharing." I did not give much thought to the name of the program or the poster, only that it might appear attractive and non-threatening to potential participants. But already the different layers within my approach were becoming visible – the emphasis on narrative and bringing stories to life, the mix of recreational and instrumental purpose, and a light-hearted approach that did not emphasise a final performance. Ultimately, what I delivered was a program of 23 two-hour drama workshop sessions, once or twice a week over four months, in which we explored a range of forms and approaches as described in the chapters that follow. These included improvisation games, drama skills development (including voice, movement and symbol), play-building, text-based performance work and ultimately the development of a devised performance based around Inspiring Women from History. The performance was presented to around 30 other prisoners (invited by the participants) and one staff member at the end of the program.
As the project evolved, I shifted my focus away from instrumental benefit and towards narrative and aesthetic engagement, being drawn to the work of John Dewey (1934), Jerome Bruner (1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004) and a number of aesthetic and narrative theorists who have followed them, or worked in similar terrain (including Bamberg, 2007; Carroll, 1997; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Garrison, 1997, 2004; Grange, 2004; Granger, 2001, 2006, 2010; Sarbin, 1986, 1990, 2005; Shusterman, 2000b, 2008b). After the program was complete, I developed a pragmatist aesthetic frame through which to view the experience (and the data), which will be described in detail in Chapter 1. I have used this theoretical frame to inform every aspect of the study, and therefore it will inform the overall structure of my thesis, including the applied theatre and prison theatre literature, my methodology and the analysis of the project. My research questions evolved alongside my developing understanding of this theory, and with my initial interest in finding new ways to address change and rehabilitation, I established a key methodological concern for my study, which was to find a way of integrating the aesthetic with the instrumental, rather than importing models from outside the art form of drama to analyse and describe its transformative or ameliorative potentials.

Within this framework, a number of key terms have become apparent, the complexity and implications of which will be comprehensively explored throughout the thesis. I have pursued the notions of self-making and world-making as advanced by Bruner (1991a); as well as a poetics of self- and world-creation as present within the work of Granger (2001, 2006, 2010) and Sarbin (1997, 1998b); and the idea of personal and cultural renewal, as present within the work of Garrison (1997, 2004), Granger, and Shusterman (2000b, 2008b). These offered an opportunity for change to be conceived as an aesthetic process, and the ability to explore it from within the art form of drama. My principal research question therefore has become:

In Living Stories, what was the nature of the women's engagement, and the potential for movement towards personal and cultural renewal?

This overarching question, and the notion of different forms of engagement, has led to the following further areas of focus:

- To gain a deeper understanding of the poetics of self- and world-creation and renewal within the process.
- To explore how emotion, spontaneity, narrative and role informed these poetics.
- To explore the key tensions and rhythms that underpinned the experience of Living Stories.

In the sections below, I will continue to give some broader background to the study, in order to give the reader some orientation to what was essentially a very open and experimental project in terms of both research and practice.

**Background and Context**

**The correctional landscape**

Moving away from an explicitly rehabilitative agenda has led to an emphasis in my study on how the work might depart from the institutional versions of rehabilitation and reform that prevail in the context of corrections in Australia more broadly, and specifically within BWCC. A useful starting point in understanding these has been the descriptive national picture of offender programs compiled by Heseltine, Day and Sarre (2011). The report excludes wellbeing, and vocational education and training (VET) programs from its scope, with the authors suggesting that these are, “reintegrating rather than rehabilitative,” and noting that there is little evidence to support their efficacy in terms of reducing recidivism (p. 2). The authors used a combination of face-to-face interviews with government and prison authorities, and a review of official documentation to create their picture (p. 7), which although now somewhat dated, still accurately portrays much of the contemporary correctional landscape. According to the report, the principal framework that still informs current rehabilitation theory in Australia is What Works (McGuire, 1995). This approach to offender programming represented a significant shift in the UK criminal justice system towards evidence-based approaches to rehabilitation that were largely informed by Cognitive and Behavioural Theory (CBT). The What Works literature has continued to influence the range of offending behaviour programs that are currently being used across all jurisdictions in Australia (see Heseltine et al.; Howells et al., 2004). Geese Theatre Company’s work is influenced in part by this CBT focus, emphasising the capacity of the individual to take personal responsibility for their offending, to identify the thoughts and feelings that give rise to negative actions, and to ultimately change their behaviour (see Baim et al., 2002). A detailed exploration of the content and delivery of the programs offered in Australia is beyond the scope of this study; however, they focus on areas such as substance abuse/misuse, general offending, domestic violence, anger management and sexual offending and are
offered to varying degrees across the different state jurisdictions in Australia (Heseltine et al.).

Heseltine et al. (2011) report that a number of non-offending focused programs are offered in Australian prisons, including those that focus on adult education and VET. Although the authors suggest that there is little evidence to support the efficacy of these programs in terms of reducing recidivism (p. 2), QCS nevertheless suggests that VET assists in the rehabilitation of offenders by increasing their skills and opportunities for employment upon release from custodial or community sentences (Queensland Corrective Services, 2013). Addressing the efficacy of VET in Australia, Dawe (2007) suggests, “Research in the United States has shown that successful transition from prison to community requires the integration of education, training and support, both in prison and in the community” (p. 11). She offers a list of findings from the research, including the suggestion that criminogenic programs that “target the behaviour directly related to the offence” are not necessarily effective (p. 14). She then goes on to make an argument for VET as a significant factor in the reduction of offending when offered alongside other support services (pp. 14-15). At BWCC, I observed that VET programs were run in conjunction with external prison industries such as clothing manufacture, and internal industries such as catering, landscape gardening and hairdressing.

It has only been in recent years that the specific needs of women have been acknowledged in terms of programming in Australian corrections (see Byrne & Howells, 2002; Easteal, 2001; Howells et al., 2004; Queensland Corrective Services, 2008a; Sorbello et al., 2002); and the Heseltine et al. (2011) report now reflects the diversity of programs offered specifically to women. In this report, the authors highlight how certain existing CBT programs have been augmented for women by the inclusion of strategies from dialectical behaviour therapy; and they recommend the targeting of victimisation, self-esteem and interpersonal needs as issues that are specific to women prisoners. Howells et al. cite Sorbello et al. (2002) and Byrne and Howells (2002) in pointing out women’s “distinctive areas of need” in relation to treatment programs: “Multiple and co-occurring mental health problems; needs relating to family relationships and parenting; victimisation; communication and assertiveness problems; reintegration and skills training needs” (p. 63). They suggest, “Mental health problems are more common for women prisoners than for male prisoners,” with high levels of substance abuse, drug-related offending, “neglectful or abusive backgrounds” and “self-esteem problems” (p. 64). Easteal adds to this higher
rates of suicide and self-harm in women inmates than men (p. 88). And Goulding (2004) describes in detail the impacts on women prisoners of “severed connections” from community and family. The QCS Women Offenders Policy and Action Plan (2008a) lists a set of principles that include responsivity to women’s needs and life experiences; an emphasis on relationships and family connections; post-sentence support and inter-agency collaboration (p. 4).

Despite an apparent history that goes back to the convict era (see Jordan, 2002; McAvinchey, 2011, p. 55), in Australia, prison theatre, and indeed the arts in corrections more broadly, is a relatively undocumented field. In my review of corporate documents from QCS, there is no discussion about the arts in recent reports and strategic plans (see Queensland Corrective Services, 2008a, 2008b, 2013); and only occasional mention of (predominantly visual) arts in the corrections news that is available on the QCS website (Queensland Corrective Services, 2015). Yet there is significant anecdotal evidence to suggest that the arts are offered in correctional programming in this country, albeit often under the radar of official documentation. This was brought to light at the Creative Innovations in Corrections conference (Griffith University, n.d.), where arts practitioners, researchers and representatives from criminal justice convened in Brisbane to discuss the field of performing arts in corrections for the first time in this country. This conference came out of the Captive Audiences research project (Balfour, Bartleet, Davey, Rynne, & Schippers, 2014), and it highlighted many arts initiatives occurring across the country in areas such as poetry, music, video and audio production. However, documented accounts of prison theatre occurring in Australia still appear limited, with only a small number of companies and projects receiving any kind of exposure, let alone rigorous academic attention. The two most significant of these are the Queensland Shakespeare Ensemble’s Shakespeare Prison Project mentioned earlier (see Heard et al., 2013); and Somebody’s Daughter Theatre based in Victoria (see Clark, 2004).

**Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre**

Following from the Kennedy report into Corrective Services in Queensland (1988) and the reforms that followed, the government saw fit to re-brand the jail or the prison and began calling them correctional centres. Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre (BWCC) sits in one of Brisbane’s industrial suburbs known as Wacol and, like its neighbours the Brisbane Correctional Centre (men’s prison), the Brisbane Youth
Detention Centre (children's prison) and Wolston Correctional Centre ("protection" prison); BWCC is surrounded by walls, high fences and razor wire. Within those confines there is a complex of modern buildings connected by covered walkways, but to get to these one has to pass through the same series of x-ray machines, fingerprint scanners, security checks and heavy slamming doors as most prisons – all under the watchful eyes of dozens of security cameras. Without exception, every woman I have met there calls it a jail. The jail has a capacity of approximately 260 prisoners, with two types of accommodation: "secure" and "residential". Secure is more reminiscent of the traditional image of a prison: locked units around a central common space. The residential section looks a little like a small urban village, with two storey apartment buildings surrounding a concrete area with benches. These apartments each house up to six prisoners, who live together in the same way as flatmates, sharing a weekly allocation of groceries, cooking their own meals and keeping the place clean. At BWCC, as with any prison, there is a broad spectrum of offences for which the women are incarcerated – ranging from "white collar" crime such as fraud, all the way through to murder. In the case of the majority of the women who participated in Living Stories, I only found out about their offences, backgrounds or particular needs, when a participant or staff member chose to share this information with me.

The women at BWCC undertook work in industries such as cleaning, cooking, clothing manufacture and landscape gardening, and were offered a range of rehabilitation and VET programs. There were limited opportunities for sustained arts programs at BWCC at the time that I ran Living Stories, due to a combination of poor resourcing in terms of staff and equipment, and the highly mobile nature of the prison population. The Education Officers Helen and Nancy had told me about their previous efforts to start a choir, a creative writing group and music classes, but these were seen as extra-curricular, and not properly resourced or supported by QCS. These informal arts activities had petered out by the time I arrived, and the only other opportunities available were the prison magazine, that published writing by prisoners; and a visual art workshop that was being run by a teacher from Brisbane’s institution for VET: Technical and Further Education (TAFE). There was some discussion from the women about these in our first group interview (Group Interview 1), where it seemed that censorship and internal politics were an issue for the magazine, which was currently being edited and largely written by one of our participants, Gwen. The participants Rachel and Emma also complained that art class...
times were irregular and called randomly, which made it difficult to engage in on a sustained basis (Group Interview 1). For institutional celebrations such as International Women's Day and ANZAC day, there was occasionally some form of artistic outcome pursued, such as a painted mural, a homemade fashion show or a performance of music and song. Helen pointed out how marginalised the arts often were in the centre due to the focus on "post-discharge employment" and "certification" over and above developing a person's "self worth" (Staff Interview 1). I must assume that it was for some of these reasons that the Education Officers and the participants appeared to be extremely welcoming of Living Stories at BWCC.

The program posters that I have described in the previous section were put up in the residential part of the prison only, and the women were invited to sign up on a voluntary basis. The only criteria for attendance were that the women did not have "association issues" i.e. they were not known to have conflicts with other members of the group; and they must not be enrolled in other programs being offered at the same time. I began with approximately 12 participants, with the number fluctuating between six and eight for several weeks, and by the end of the program being down to five. This is fairly common in a prison context, particularly BWCC, where the population is quite mobile, and there are not significant numbers of long-term prisoners. The women were aged between 22-60 years old, and were a mix of white and white/Aboriginal Australians, with one New Zealander, one Pacific Islander, a Muslim woman who had been born in India but grown up in Singapore; and one woman of African appearance who did not wish to disclose her culture, but stated that she had been born overseas. In the individual case stories that appear in Chapters 5-8, I will paint a more detailed picture of the participants, but this is a general overview of the women who joined the program, and it may be assumed that they shared some of the characteristics and needs that I have described above as pertaining to women prisoners as a population.

When I set up the program, none of the Education or Psychology staff expressed any interest in co-facilitating, or even being present for the sessions. In our initial consultation, I had agreed to run the program without staff support, and it appeared to me as time went on that they would have found it very difficult to add the drama workshops to their already significant workloads. In retrospect, it would have been beneficial for me to engage the assistance of one or more co-facilitators but I remember feeling at the time that it was likely to be too difficult to organise on top of the already complex logistics involved in gaining access. There were three staff
members who ultimately participated in the research, although they never joined me in the workshops: two Education Officers (Helen and Nancy) and an Intern Psychologist (Nikki). These staff members were all very supportive of the program throughout, and often advocated for what I was doing against resistance (and sometimes what seemed like obstruction) from Operations staff in the centre.

I ran the program in a classroom that was situated within the education block. This block also housed the art room, chapel, library and offices where psychology and education staff worked. The space was not unlike classrooms I have encountered in other institutional spaces: grey carpets, painted cinderblock walls, whiteboards and barred windows that gave onto the tennis courts, vegetable gardens and gym. Each morning, I would clear any desks to the side of the room, and arrange the plastic chairs into a circle to begin the workshop. Here I would wait, chatting informally with those who came early, until all had arrived and we could all begin our ritual check-in that marked the start of the session and invited participants to describe how they were feeling before moving into the workshop. I was left to my own devices in running the program. No staff were ever present, and I was issued with a personal “duress” — a panic button that was linked to the wireless security system — hanging from my belt and ready to press in the event of an emergency (which never occurred). While there was a security officer outside who oversaw the whole of the education block, inside the classrooms and library, it was standard practice for teaching and other staff to be left alone with the prisoners.

The 23 sessions of the program ran twice weekly, but were occasionally disrupted or cancelled due to issues such as full centre “lock-downs” where nobody was allowed in or out for security reasons, or by other demands such as official holidays or special days. Within a session, there were many disruptions as well, including calls for certain prisoners to leave the session and take their medication, go to a visit, or meet with a staff member. It was therefore rare for a session to include all the women who were enrolled in the program, for the whole duration of the two hours allocated. Despite these challenges, we completed the 23 sessions in around four months, and officially ended the program with our performance showing as mentioned above. Along side the performance, I presented the women with an unofficial certificate of participation, and conducted a post-performance reflection on the same day. My only contact with the women after this was in post-program one-to-one interviews with the remaining participants, where there was an opportunity to further reflect on the whole experience. After this, I had no further contact with the
women, although I did later encounter two of them in my subsequent contact with the prison through other projects – though not as participants. One of the women agreed to be interviewed in preparation for a second project that I delivered in BWCC, and another attended a performance as an audience member (see Chapter 8).

Overview of the Thesis

As I have stated, Chapter 1 introduces the pragmatist aesthetic theory that I will use to frame all of the exploration of literature, method and practice that follows. Informed by Dewey (1934) and Bruner (1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004), and a range of other narrative and aesthetic theorists as mentioned above (Bamberg, 2007; Carroll, 1997; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Garrison, 1997, 2004; Granger, 2004; Granger, 2006; Sarbin, 1986, 1997, 2005; Shusterman, 2000b, 2008b), the frame establishes this study as an emergent and dynamic account of experience. In this chapter, I will identify four key principles that underpin my aesthetic theory: the art of knowing, the art of participation, the art of process and the art of living, with an understanding that these all overlap and integrate in the flow of experience. The theory also contains within it the idea of rhythm and tension, wherein aesthetic experience is dependent upon the dynamic interplay between elements such subject and object, doing and undergoing ends and means, life and art. This idea of rhythm and tension will run as a thread throughout my thesis. Chapter 2 represents a review of literature in the fields of applied theatre and prison theatre that is informed by my aesthetic frame. It will begin by exploring aesthetics in the field more broadly, and then interrogate the field in relation to the arts of knowing, participation, process and living – developing these concepts further, and establishing an understanding of elements such as narrative, role, spontaneity and emotion as they are conceived in applied theatre. As such, it represents not only a survey of the field, but also a development of my aesthetic theory further. Chapter 3 represents a discussion about my method for the study, and will explore the integration of theory and practice within my arts-based design. It begins by stating my pragmatic and moral stance as I intentionally hope to achieve positive change through the practice-research. I will then go on to discuss applied theatre and narrative as knowing, the process of interpretation and analysis as it unfolded through and along side my developing theoretical lens, and the participatory and ethical dimensions of the work. This chapter will emphasise the idea that there was no clear demarcation between the
theory and the practice in my methodology, and therefore it will flow into Chapter 4, in which I will analyse the practice of Living Stories as a whole. In this chapter I will explore some of the prevailing narratives and roles that I saw as existing in the environment of BWCC, and go on to give an overview of the practice and its potentials for engagement, aesthetic engagement and renewal. This chapter will lay the foundation for the more intensive analysis and discussion that follows in Chapters 5-8, where I will focus on four individual participants' engagement with the program. These chapters are presented in the form of case stories, with each one progressively developing my understanding of the aesthetic implications of the work by testing the theory against the practice and vice versa. They represent the integration between analysis, findings and discussion that would be separated out in a more traditional thesis. They also represent a dynamic and emergent exploration of notions of renewal, as well as the nature of the women's engagement through the elements of emotion, spontaneity, narrative and role. Within the thesis, I will also explore the possibility of applied theatre being conceived as a somaesthetic practice — an aesthetic theory of embodiment put forward by Shusterman (2000b, 2000c, 2002, 2006b, 2008b, 2009a, 2011a, 2011b), as inspired by theorists such as Dewey, James, Wittgenstein, Merleau-Ponty, Bourdieu, Foucault and de Beauvoir.

Significance

My thesis does not necessarily present a neat and comprehensive set of findings that can inform the field, but rather it elucidates the dynamic and unfolding process of finding, and represents an attempt to momentarily capture the knowing within an example of applied theatre practice. This work holds a number of areas of significance, not only for my own development as a practitioner-researcher, but also hopefully in the practice and aesthetics of prison theatre and applied theatre more broadly. The dynamic form of Living Stories as an experience (Dewey, 1934) has offered up a number of swells and currents to explore within its flow, complicating and illuminating the art-life rhythm that is at the core of applied theatre. I see a number of somewhat peripheral areas of significance for this work that are nonetheless important in terms of broadening the field. This study represents an expansion of the practice and its research outcomes in an Australian correctional context, where the prison theatre field is relatively undocumented. I have been able to establish a strong connection with BWCC and QCS through delivering the project that will likely endure, while also undertaking one of very few intensive explorations of the potentials of drama with a group of adult women in this context. The study
also joins the recent turn of applied theatre scholarship back to a concern with the affective and the aesthetic, shifting it away from a stronger focus on instrumentalism (see G. White, 2015; Haseman & Winston, 2010). As such, it has reflected my own development as a practitioner, shifting towards an integration between the aesthetic and the instrumental – towards a poetic and aesthetic conception of embodied forms of ethics and personal and cultural renewal: The art of living. Within this, I have begun to explore the practice in part through the pragmatic lens of Shusterman’s *somaethetics* (2000b, 2000c, 2002, 2006b, 2008b, 2009a, 2011a, 2011b), a significant expansion of a field that has only just begun to be articulated in terms of art-based performance practices (see Arnold, 2005; Jay, 2002; Mullis, 2006b, 2008; Petersen, 2013). This represents an alignment with and an expansion on other emerging theories about embodied experiencing in aesthetics, applied theatre and performance some of which are informed by areas such as cognitive neuroscience (see Barone & Eisner, 2012; Finley, 2011; Johnson, 2007; McConachie & Hart, 2006; Shaughnessy, 2015). The most significant aspect of this exploration is the articulation of a prison theatre experience using an aesthetic theory that has been developed and refined *through* an analysis of the practice. This not only expands the epistemological terrain of arts-based and applied theatre research, but I believe it also provides depth and complexity to the frequently professed but little analysed humanising and transformative potentials of prison theatre.
Chapter 1. The Rhythms of Life and Art: A theoretical lens

Introduction

This chapter will position my theoretical lens, and in doing so begin to articulate a framework for viewing the experience of Living Stories that might also serve to explore applied theatre and, more specifically, prison theatre in other contexts. My practice over the years has been concerned with devising new work with participants, much of which has either overtly elicited personal narrative material, or has implicitly incorporated elements of participants' lived experiences. It has been influenced by dramatic forms such as Theatre of the Oppressed, verbatim, reminiscence and testimonial performance, and at times incorporated aspects of counselling, drama therapy and psychodrama. In particular, I have remained interested in the nature of the relationship between participants' lived experiences and the drama they create. As I began to dig more deeply into the experience of Living Stories, a story emerged about the rhythm between art and life and the permeable boundary between the fictional and factual in the narratives and roles that were represented in and around the workshop space. It was only through experiencing the project and its nuances that I came to find and develop a theoretical lens through which to view it, and this thesis is as much a document of how the theory has developed as informed by the practice and vice versa. I will describe the mechanics of this process in detail in Chapter 3, in which I will attempt to demarcate method in the flow of my experience.

My interest in the art-life rhythm and personal narratives led me towards two key theorists: John Dewey and Jerome Bruner, both of whom are situated within the philosophical tradition of American Pragmatism (see Bakhurst & Shanker, 2001; Shusterman, 2000b). Dewey's (1934) work *Art as Experience* resonates strongly for me, in that it sets out an embodied, experiential aesthetic theory that integrates art and life. Although it is commonly thought of as Dewey's treatise on aesthetics, I would suggest that it is more so a theory of experience, within which with the aesthetic is elevated to being key to how we make meaning. Jerome Bruner's work – particularly *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986) and *Acts of Meaning* (1990) – integrates narrative and life. Rather than apply the surgical precision of rational logic or linguistic analysis to these problems, both Dewey and Bruner approach them intuitively, poetically, and certainly holistically. Both men eschew the troubling tendency that Johnson (2007) Shusterman (2000b) identify within analytic aesthetics and philosophy: to split the mind from the body, and
relegate emotion as being apart from and secondary to reason and cognition. While Bruner does not appear to overtly acknowledge a debt to Dewey, their shared position within the American Pragmatist tradition has brought about many parallels in their theories of experience and knowledge. Crucially, their theories democratise narrative and aesthetic experiencing so that they become the province of all human beings, not just artists or scholars. What I sense in both their work is a constant rhythmic flow between what we experience, how we make sense of it and how we then express our understanding. The holistic approaches of both Dewey and Bruner encouraged me to explore simultaneously within Living Stories the aesthetic within our experience, and our experiences of the aesthetic, the aesthetic being a slippery term that I will attempt to define below. This overarching theory formed a skeleton that I will continue to flesh out in Chapter 2 with concepts and theories specific to the applied theatre forms that were used in the project.

This chapter will begin by addressing the aesthetic element of my theoretical lens as informed by Dewey's (1934) *Art as Experience* and a selection of contemporary scholars who, influenced by Dewey, work in the areas of aesthetics, ethics and education – most notably Shusterman (see 2000a, 2000b; 2008b), but also others such as Garrison (1997, 2004), Grange (2004), Granger (2001, 2006, 2010) and Johnson (2007). In particular, I will focus on the nature of aesthetic experience as an integral part of embodied meaning making in everyday life, and the elements of Dewey's theory that make it particularly relevant to my study. The chapter will then explore narrative as informed by Bruner (1959, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004) and a selection of other narrative theorists, including Carroll (1997), Clandinin (2007), Clandinin and Connelly (2000), Goldie (2012) and Sarbin (1986, 1990, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2005). I will explore narrative as an interpretative and expressive structure for experience, and acknowledge it as a key element within applied theatre practice and research. I will follow this by extracting four principles from within the theory that I feel make it particularly pertinent to a study in applied theatre: *the art of knowing, the art of participation, the art of process* and *the art of living*. My view of Living Stories is built around the rhythmic movement between art and life – the meta-rhythm – within which a range of other rhythms and tensions are present: between self and world, subject and object, doing and undergoing, surrender and reflection; and others that I uncovered as I began to analyse the work in more depth. I join Kershaw and Nicholson (2011, p. 2) in not seeing these as fixed binaries, but acknowledge that our experience within Living Stories constantly moved between and across them. These rhythms I will discuss in more detail in the
chapters that follow, but the notion of rhythm has become an important element of
how I now view the practice, anchoring me as a practitioner not only in terms of the
rhythms in narrative, text and drama, but also in music…and in life.

The Aesthetic

Some people say that it's just rock 'n' roll,
But it gets you right down to your soul.
You've got to just keep on pushing, keep on pushing,
Push the sky away. (Cave, 2012)

I cannot consider the aesthetic without considering rock 'n' roll. The most powerful
aesthetic experiences I regularly have these days are at rock concerts. Nick Cave sang
the above lyric at an outdoor concert in a grassed amphitheatre. The song, “Push the
Sky Away” is a basic, very slow, three-chord hymn. A departure from Cave’s usual
complex narratives, it is a simple call to the listener (himself?) to keep pushing the
boundaries as an artist and a human being. The feelings I experienced when he sang the
song were complex: a mixture of elation that he was speaking to me with his message,
but regret for the time that I have wasted; hope that I can do things differently, but
despair that I am mortal and I do not have much time; loneliness inside my thoughts,
but communion with 9000 other souls. Tears in my eyes, hairs standing on the back of
my neck, mouth foolishly half open, I was swaying to the slow booming bass rhythm
that pulsed through the song like the march of time standing still. The music was
simultaneously inside me, and all around me. I was experiencing a moment of
interaction with the song that made it bleed through the boundaries of my skin, and
made me bleed out. The concert was an experience I will probably never forget; and it
contained numerous other powerful, affecting moments within its arc, increasing in
intensity as it moved towards consummation. Songs containing images of love, faith and
beautiful English gardens were intermingled with songs of weeping, murder and the
electric chair. This was not “just rock ‘n’ roll.”

This image of the aesthetic belongs to me. It also belongs to the 9000 others
that were at the show that night. Following Dewey (1934), it is not relegated to being
some objective, distant, rarefied ideal, but is wild and unruly. There is room for ugliness,
beauty, pain and pleasure: the Sistine Chapel or “Jumping Jack Flash”. It involves active,
avive participation. It is a process and a product. It is an experience that integrates
thinking, imagining, feeling and acting. It is, as Johnson (2007) suggests, concerned with
“the bodily depths of human meaning-making through our visceral connection to our
world” (p. xi). As such, it makes perfect sense to me as a viable version of the aesthetic with which to explore applied theatre. I am not the first person to make a strong connection to Dewey’s aesthetic theory via my love for contemporary popular music. Scholars such as Fesmire (2003), Shusterman (2000a, 2000b) and Sartwell (1995, 2007) have all used forms such as jazz, blues, country, rock, hip-hop, rap and techno to illustrate the egalitarian, interactive and culturally determined nature of Dewey’s aesthetics. As Johnson argues, other philosophers in the analytic tradition “have developed elaborate conceptual schemes for identifying the so-called cognitive, structural, and formal aspects of experience, thought and language, but they lack adequate philosophical resources to plumb the depths of the qualitative feeling dimensions of experience and meaning” (p. x). In this section, I will place some parameters around my use of the word aesthetic, give a brief overview of where Dewey’s theory fits in the historical context of the term, and in particular, mark out aesthetic experience and engagement as my interest here.

Prior to aesthetics becoming a widespread term and discipline, the study of beauty, virtue and poetics in art has been a concern of Western philosophers since the Greeks (see Aristotle, 2006). It is widely accepted that German philosopher Alexander Baumgarten first coined the term aesthetics during the Enlightenment (see Feagin & Maynard, 1997; Guyer, 2004; Kivy, 2004; Shusterman, 2006a, 2012; G. White, 2015; Winston, 2010), deriving it from the Greek word for sensory perception and describing it as, “A science of how things are known by means of the senses,” or “the science of sensitive cognition” (Baumgarten, 1735/1739/1750, as cited in Guyer, p. 15). Winston suggests,

It was at this time that the sciences and the arts were conceptualised as epistemologically different, the former dependent upon a system of logical thinking, of facts and proofs, the latter as sensuous in nature, founded in pleasure rather than logic and centred principally around the attribute of beauty.

(p. 19)

Guyer asserts that Baumgarten’s project was given impetus by a number of his contemporaries such as Addison, Du Bos, Hutcheson and Shaftesbury, who signalled a new interest in the freedom of the imagination. Mothersill (2004) argues that these theorists, along with Burke, Hume and Kames explored the realm of taste and, “Offered worthwhile suggestions about the psychological aspects of beauty” (p. 156). Yet Winston suggests that it was Immanuel Kant who integrated elements of these theories to present, “The most coherent and influential theory of aesthetic knowledge and the
nature of the pleasure at the heart of aesthetic experience" (p. 19). Winston provides a useful summary of aesthetics since Kant, suggesting that Kantian aesthetics was very much a product of its age, generated by rational, logical reasoning and privileging the mind over the body, yet echoes of it can still be felt today. Those fundamental features of Kant's theory that Winston identifies in his summary were exactly those that I would suggest Dewey (1934) later opposed: (a) the disinterested, passive contemplation of the art work which results in an escape from the world in which we live; (b) a split between the perceiver and the object; (c) the aesthetic as removed from our "base" desires and appetites - situation of aesthetic perception in the mind and spirit alone, rather than the body; (d) a focus on beauty, where beauty is divided into "the beautiful" (charming, pleasing, feminine) and "the sublime" (moving, awe-inspiring, masculine); and (e) the art work speaks a special, technical language that can only be understood by initiates and therefore excludes ordinary people and popular art forms (pp. 19-31). Winston observes that Kant did, however, begin the important exploration of the role of play and imagination, and the relationship between emotion and cognition, or feeling and knowing in aesthetic perception (Winston, pp. 27-28), setting the stage for subsequent inquiry into aesthetic experience and education.

Winston (2010) continues his summary to suggest that following on from Kant and his contemporaries, the nineteenth century Aesthetic Movement saw beauty as "an end in itself" and "divorced from moral and hence political concerns" (p. 22). This, in turn, was followed by the epistemological, technological and political upheavals of Modernism, whose art rejected the beautiful in favour of the sublime, and was characterised by "difficulty and incipient ugliness" that had political and social commentary at its heart (p. 34). Dewey's only comprehensive work in aesthetics - Art as Experience (1934) - came late in his life and I would suggest was a product of these modernist times. Shusterman (2000b) describes Dewey's theory as "pragmatist aesthetics", distinguishing it from its contemporary continental and analytic philosophical traditions. He suggests that this was influenced strongly by Hegel, departing from Kantian analytic philosophy. Pragmatism was concerned with "central doctrines on truth, knowledge and experience" (p. 5) and the holistic notion of "organic unity": "The idea that no element or concept had an independent identity or essence but rather is entirely a function of its interrelations with all the other elements and concepts of the whole to which it belongs" (p. 5). Dewey and his contemporaries in the pragmatist tradition therefore strove to put back together what Kant had taken apart (see Dewey, p. 263). Yet Shusterman suggests that it was the predominance of the
analytic and continental versions of aesthetics that resulted in Dewey's aesthetic theory being largely overlooked at the time, and only recently re-examined (see also P. W. Jackson, 1998, pp. xi-xii).

Shusterman (2006a) describes aesthetics as a confusing and contested term that variously refers to objects of perception, the modes of consciousness that grasp such objects, and the discourse used to discuss those objects and modes of consciousness (p. 217; see also G. White, 2015, pp. 5-10). The use of the term commonly incites confusion over whether it refers to art alone, or can be applied to other objects and experiences; whether it refers to things of beauty and experiences of pleasure, or can equally be applied to ugliness and pain; whether it has value, or exists for its own sake; whether its value can be measured objectively, or only subjectively; whether it is an integral, vital form of human knowledge, or an added extra – a cherry on top. Shusterman (2008a) observes that similarly, aesthetic experience is also a difficult term to define, with the concept of experience having its own history and nuances within philosophy (pp. 217-218). As a result, contemporary debates in aesthetics cover such questions as whether or not everyday experiences such as sex, sport and enjoying a good meal can be aesthetic in nature (see Kupfer, 1983; Light & Smith, 2005; Mandoki, 2007; Shusterman & Tomlin, 2008). My conception of aesthetic experience will be explored in more detail below, but it is influenced strongly by the sense of pragmatism that Shusterman identifies in Dewey’s theory. I am drawn to the possibility of pragmatically seeking out the nature, meaning and qualities of aesthetic experience specifically within the art form of applied theatre: a form that is characterised by experiences relating to both art and the everyday.

Dewey's (1934) aesthetic theory proposes that experience in all of life has potentially aesthetic qualities; and that aesthetic experience in both life and art is a rhythmic process of interactive, culturally determined meaning-making that integrates cognition, imagination, emotion and action as they move towards qualitative unity. Dewey opens his work with a biological imperative inspired by Darwin (see Dewey, 2007), describing the most basic interaction between the “organism” and its “environment”: “Life itself consists of phases in which the organism falls out of step with the march of surrounding things and then recovers unison with it” (Dewey, 1934, p. 12). However, this recovery of step only maintains equilibrium and does not signify growth or development:
Life grows when a temporary falling out is a transition to a more extensive balance of the energies of the organism with those of the conditions under which it lives. ... The moment of passage from disturbance into harmony is that of intenselyst life. (pp. 13-17)

Contained within this fundamental biological view is the idea of rhythm, which drums through his entire treatise. The interaction of the organism with its environment is a basic rhythm, within which all other rhythms and counter-rhythms occur. He claims that these biological interactions “reach to the roots of the aesthetic in experience” (p. 13). However, experience itself does not necessarily move us towards the aesthetic. To do this, it must be an experience. For Dewey, experience is both a doing and an undergoing, but for it to be characterised as an experience, it must “run its course to fulfilment” (p. 36). Such experiences, Dewey suggests, do not merely end, but are “consummatory”: they are rounded out to become suffused with meaning. He illustrates this using the metaphor of a river and a pond, pointing to the hermeneutic quality of an experience:

A river, as distinct from a pond, flows. But its flow gives definiteness and interest to its successive portions greater than exist in the homogenous portions of a pond. In an experience, flow is from something to something. As one part leads into another and as one part carries on what went before, each gains distinctness in itself. The enduring whole is diversified by successive phases that are emphases of its varied colours. (p. 38)

This hermeneutic quality is also reflected in Bruner’s (1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b) conception of narrative, “The form of the whole is ... present in every member” (Dewey, p. 56). But far from being a discrete, fenced off and homogenous whole, contemporary scholars such as Granger (2001), Alexander (1998) and Shusterman (2009b) assert that Dewey’s idea of unity is changeable, diverse and capable of plurality in its composition; something that still gives it credence today in light of postmodern fragmentation and multi-vocal subjectivities. Shusterman (2000b) suggests, “For Dewey, the permanence of experienced unity is not only impossible, it is aesthetically undesirable; for art requires the challenge of tension and disruptive novelty and the rhythmic struggle of achievement and breakdown of order” (p. 32). It is this dynamic unity that gives an experience its aesthetic quality, and characterises the artistic process as merely one form of aesthetic experience. For Dewey, aesthetic experience is made meaningful through what he calls aesthetic emotion — an integration of cognition, imagination and emotion that I will explore in more detail below. Also significant in
Dewey’s theory is the idea that the artistic process and the art product exemplify the ongoing interaction between organism and environment: the two are inseparable. Subject and object, self and world, process and product, ends and means are therefore integrated in their flow towards unity. Within this integrative process, Granger (2001, 2006) suggests, lies the potential for personal and cultural renewal through aesthetic experience – a significant aspect of Dewey’s pragmatism. I have adopted the concept of renewal as being key to my exploration within Living Stories, specifically through Granger’s use and interpretation of the term, and I will develop my understanding of renewal further throughout this chapter and those that follow.

The Narrative

In the tale, in the telling, we are all one blood. Take the tale in your teeth, then, and bite till the blood runs, hoping it’s not poison; and we will all come to the end together, and even to the beginning: living, as we do, in the middle. (Le Guin, 1981, p. 195)

Le Guin’s wild metaphor describes the risk, excitement and communion that can be involved in storytelling. What unites us as human beings is both the tale and the telling – an act of comprehension and expression that marks a moment in the cyclic flow of experience, yet ideally speaks to eternity. The story need not be neat, safe, stable or linear. It may be unpleasant, ugly or even dangerous – like the murder ballads and tales of woe that march darkly through the scripture of folk, country and blues music. Like Cave’s (2014) sea monster, her image brings to mind a thrashing, unruly beast whose truths we can only take hold of momentarily before we must let them go. This metaphor also harks to the notion of narrative being freed from traditional historiography and literary theory, and allowed to range about through the various fields of philosophy, psychology and social science (see Bakhurst & Shanker, 2001; Bamberg, 2007; Bruner, 1991b; Chase, 2005, 2011; Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Maynes, Pierce, & Laslett, 2008; McAdams, Josselson, & Leiblich, 2006; Polkinghorne, 1988, 1995; Sarbin, 1986, 1990, 2005). This somewhat wild version of narrative is vital to me as I address my work in applied theatre. In the applied theatre work I do with others, the narratives are often risky, seldom neat, and speak to the messy intermingling of experiences: the participants’ and mine; the past, present and future; those from inside the workshop space and those from outside. But the tale, and its blood represent a structure, however unwieldy, with which we might begin to understand and articulate our experiences. However much it weaves and twists and turns, the tale has a sense of unity that gives it coherence as a whole. Here, I will explore this image of narrative,
predominantly via the work of philosopher and psychologist, Jerome Bruner (1959, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004). I will describe his theory of narrative in the context of what is now a strong epistemological movement in philosophy, psychology, social sciences and qualitative research; identifying the key elements of Bruner's theory that I have merged with Dewey's (1934) to inform my own work.

Granger (2006) suggests that Dewey's conception of the immediacy of experience places it "beyond the descriptive capacity of language," thereby presenting, "a substantial challenge to the customary practices and norms of philosophy" which have a strong basis in linguistics, or reduce the immediacy of experience to the merely subjective (Granger, 2006, pp. 5-6). In Bruner's (1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004) conception, narrative could be seen as the ice that momentarily freezes Dewey's river of experience into an organising structure, with the knowledge that the ice will then change the character of its flow (see also Sarbin, 1986, 1990, 1998a, 1998b). Story, in the wild and temporary yet lasting sense that is evoked by these metaphors, is an inescapable element of drama practice and one that drives me as an artist and researcher. Drama is, as Nicholson (2005) suggests, a "narrative art" (p. 63) and as such, narrative is not only an integral part of the form itself, but can also become a useful tool in exploring how it engages participants aesthetically and otherwise. As described elsewhere, my interest in narrative focuses on the intersection between personal and dramatic narratives as they are explored, interpreted and expressed through improvisation and devised work; not necessarily limited to being the neat, linear structure proposed by earlier, more traditional versions of literary theory. In applied theatre, it seems that narrative can manifest as an actual story, or the ghost of a story: the implicit presence of character, action and plot, flexible in their constitution and arrangement in time and space. Yet the theory explored here suggests that narrative provides an organising structure for experience and identity – a structure that manifests in both our understanding of ourselves and the world, and our outward expression of that understanding. Dewey's (1934) aesthetic theory articulates how human beings interact with their environment, which according to Bruner's theory, is commonly organised and expressed through narrative. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledge the connection by simply stating: "Why narrative? . . . Because experience" (p. 50).

Narrative theory has become an increasingly popular interdisciplinary field in the last 40 years, and while Bamberg (2007) suggests its origins are difficult to trace, there is wide acceptance that Bruner (1959, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004) has been a significant figure in its development (see Bakhurst & Shanker, 2001; Bamberg).
According to Olson (2001), Bruner had a strong aesthetic sense in his work, holding that the scientific and the artistic mind operate in similar ways in the construction of meaning. His concern with culture and the human condition saw him draw regularly on literature and literary theory. Although he never interrogated the aesthetic as such, his psychology and philosophy of mind have strong links to the pragmatist aesthetics of Dewey (1934). Working in the cognitive tradition of psychology that he helped to establish, Bruner became critical of its computational model of the human mind as a passive processor of information. Bruner describes a “mild crisis” that he experienced between the “logical and the intuitive”, or the more systematic psychological research that he was doing, and his aesthetic engagement with a range of artistic texts (1986, p. 8). Dewey too was suspicious of, “false psychologies that play havoc with aesthetic philosophies” (p. 246), by splitting or separating the human “self” from his/her world. Bruner subsequently developed his early work on myth and “art as a mode of knowing” (1959, p. 352) to join what he called a “paradigm shift” (1991b, p. 5) towards narrative; a shift that was signalled by the release of Mitchell’s interdisciplinary collection of papers, *On Narrative* (1981). This shift away from a mechanistic model for human understanding towards integrating literary narrative and myth was also reflected in the work of Sarbin (1986, 1990, 1998a, 1998b, 2005) – a contemporary of Bruner’s and another key theorist in narrative psychology. Others such as Barthes (1977), Ricoeur (1984) and Polkinghorne (1988, 1995) influenced what is now described as a “narrative turn” in social science research (see Bamberg; Chase, 2005, 2011). In his work *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* (1986), Bruner grounded his narrative theory as an act of imagination: “The artist creates possible worlds through the metaphoric transformation of the ordinary and the conventionally ‘given’” (p. 49). He began to integrate theories from diverse disciplines such as anthropology, literary theory and linguistics to develop his central constructivist thesis that, “knowledge is made, not found” (1996, as cited in Olson, 2001, p. 104). In Bruner’s view, narrative is “a typical way that human beings frame experience” (1990, p. 56), or make meaning: “A form, not only of representing, but constituting reality” (1991b, p. 5). For Bruner, this narrative mode of thought, and the forms of narrative discourse that express it, can not be understood outside the cultural systems in which they occur.

Throughout his work, Bruner (1991b) has remained concerned with how narrative “operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality” (p. 6). Yet he seems careful to say that it is “an instrument of mind” (p. 6). I agree with Sartwell (2007) and Strawson (2004) in being cautious not to claim that it is the *only* way that
human beings make meaning; and Schiff (2007) in acknowledging its limits as a largely Western conceptual structure that has become extremely beguiling in today's culture of self-disclosure (p. 29). Yet Bruner's theory moves “back and forth between describing narrative mental ‘powers’ and the symbolic systems of narrative discourse that make the expression of these powers possible” (p. 21). Or as Peterson and Langellier (2007) describe, “narrative is both a making and a doing” (p. 205) – a performative conception of narrative that finds a home in many forms of applied theatre. Like Dewey's aesthetic theory, Bruner's (1986) conception of narrative is embodied and holistic. He decrues “the habit of drawing heavy conceptual boundaries between thought, action and emotion as ‘regions’ of the mind, then later being forced to construct conceptual bridges to connect what should never have been put asunder” (p. 106). Embedded within this idea is a sense of an embodied rhythmic flow between experience, interpretation and expression that I also see in Dewey's (1934) aesthetic theory. Bruner (2004) asserts, “The mimesis between life so-called and narrative is a two-way affair: that is to say, just as art imitates life in Aristotle's sense, so, in Oscar Wilde's, life imitates art. Narrative imitates life, life imitates narrative” (p. 692). He issues a challenge to show in detail how this two-way mimesis occurs (1991b, p. 21), using the notion of autobiography to begin this project (see 2004). My study is not an attempt to rise to Bruner's enormous challenge, but I am fascinated by the life-art rhythm as it occurs in applied theatre, and the presence and power of narrative within this rhythm.

Within this overarching conception of experience, aesthetics and narrative, I have identified four key principles that mark out the rhythmic flow of experience, and provided a framework that I would suggest is appropriate for exploring within Living Stories. While I must acknowledge that they all flow into each other like Dewey's river, I have separated these principles out to give each due consideration: The art of knowing, the art of participation, the art of process and the art of living. They will not be used as fixed rules to follow in the interpretation and analysis of my work, but rather like the staves on a page of music, they will provide some structure to the flow of notes that made up the complex melody of the experience.

The Art of Knowing

Throughout this theoretical terrain, aesthetic experience and narrative are seen as modes of meaning-making and inquiry across all of experience. Dewey (1934) asserts, “Only the psychology that has separated things which in reality belong together holds that scientists and philosophers think, while poets and painters follow their feelings” (p. 73).
He further states, "It is not possible to divide in a vital experience the practical, emotional, and intellectual from one another and to set the properties of one over against the characteristics of the others" (p. 55). In these statements, Dewey alludes to the integration of cognition, emotion and action that he sees as being necessary for knowing in both the arts and sciences. Yet he identifies the aesthetic quality of this integration as being inherently emotional and names it "aesthetic emotion" (p. 41). Hohr (2010) suggests that Dewey's concept of aesthetic emotion is somewhat ambiguous, and I am inclined to agree. In Dewey's own words, "Aesthetic emotion is native emotion transformed through the objective material to which it has committed its development and consummation" (p. 79). He goes on to describe how he sees emotion being transformed through aesthetic experience:

Our appetites know themselves when they are reflected in the mirror of art, and as they know themselves they are transfigured. Emotion that is distinctively aesthetic then occurs ... it is an emotion induced by material that is expressive, and because it is evoked by and attached to this material it consists of natural emotions that have been transformed. ... Aesthetic emotion is thus something distinctive and yet not cut off by a chasm from other and natural emotional experiences. (pp. 80-81)

The transformation of raw emotion into its aesthetic form becomes what Grange (2004) describes as "felt intelligence": "It brings the human body into full play and puts it at the disposal of human culture as a source of wisdom and intelligence" (p. 32, see also Shusterman, 2008b). Both Shusterman and Granger (2001, 2006) expand on the notion that this embodied form of wisdom and intelligence can lead to personal and cultural renewal.

I have discussed earlier the importance of a dynamic sense of unity in Dewey's (1934) and Bruner's (1959, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004) conceptions of art, experience and narrative. The knowing in aesthetic experience is achieved through perceiving the integrative tensions and qualitative wholeness within an experience, expressive act or object. P. W. Jackson (1998) interprets Dewey's theory of art making as a process of following the impulse of selection and rejection in order to pursue this "consummatory experience" or "qualitative unity" (p. 36). Many see this process as being driven in no small part by emotion (see Carroll, 1997; Courtney, 1995; P. W. Jackson; Lutterbie, 2006; Radford, 2004; Witkin, 1974). Shusterman (2000b) asserts that Dewey's version of unity, "Not only contains, but is sustained and enhanced by the tension of the opposites that it embraces" (p. 64), drawing on thinkers such as
Heraclitus, Coleridge, Heidegger and De Man to support this argument. He adds, "Modern science seems to reveal that radical opposition inhabits the unities of nature right down to the positive and negative charges of the atom" (p. 64). This idea of qualitative tensions is present throughout the narrative theory that I have drawn on here. Bruner (1991b) cites Ricoeur (1984-1988), Turner (1982) and H. White (1978) in identifying a key feature of narrative as containing the breach of a canonical script or a set of accepted cultural norms that leads to a sense of crisis. This reflects Dewey's fundamental rhythm between disturbance and harmony as described earlier. Dewey suggests that the raw "discharge" of emotion in experience lacks the resistance necessary to create tension within the rhythms that give an experience its form (p. 162). The tension between cognition and emotion is therefore vital in apprehending the qualitative unity of an experience, and that qualitative unity is itself driven by tension.

In this thesis, the art of knowing will therefore be used to signify the embodied apprehension of meaning and value that is driven by aesthetic emotion — a complex interplay of cognition, imagination, emotion and action that occurs when an experience's rhythms and tensions drive it towards qualitative unity. The art of knowing also embraces the idea that narrative has the potential to reflect this qualitative unity, momentarily capturing it in structural form. In the chapter that follows, I will use my theoretical lens to explore how this embodied knowing is constituted within applied theatre.

The Art of Participation

I have acknowledged earlier that these four principles are inextricably linked; they flow through each other in the river of experience and therefore I see the art of participation as intermingled with the art of process and vice versa. Although Dewey (1934) begins by building his theory on the interaction between "the organism" and "the environment" in a Darwinian sense (see Dewey, 2007), this is extrapolated to become a dynamic interaction between self and world that both influences and is influenced by culture. The art of participation signifies for me the egalitarianism within Dewey's aesthetic theory, the overarching operation of this self-world rhythm, and the idea that selves and worlds are made and re-made in the cycle of experience. Experience, Dewey states, is "active and alert commerce with the world" (p. 19). This crucial rhythm between self and world can be found elsewhere in Dewey's theories on education, democracy and philosophy of mind (see Dewey, 1940, 1963; Fairfield, 2009; Gale, 2010; Garrison, 2008; Hendley, 2010; Hickman, 1998, 2011; Hickman & Alexander, 1998).
As explored previously, the aesthetic is not the sole province of the singular elite artist and the artefact that s/he produces, but a social, interactive process in which both are changed by the interaction. In this sense, Dewey's (1934) aesthetic theory has the same constructivist and egalitarian qualities as Bruner's (1959, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004) narrative theory. Bruner (1991b) acknowledges that the narrative self is created in constant negotiation and renegotiation with the cultural and other contexts within which we experience the world. Bruner (1986) suggests, “Our sensitivity to narrative provides the major link between our own sense of self and our sense of others in the social world around us” (p. 69). As Shusterman (2010) notes, Dewey saw aesthetic experience as situated within historical, social and political contexts, thereby widening the view of art from one of “narrow formalism” (p. 31). Shusterman (1994) similarly observes that Dewey's liberalism “sought to bridge the private and the public,” (p. 396) embracing the idea that the individual should be free to develop and grow in the context of an “active communal life” (p. 395). “Works of art that are not remote from common life, that are widely enjoyed in a community, are signs of a unified collective life” (Dewey, p. 81). Yet Dewey did not promote homogeneity in his version of a “unified collective life”, but a sense of unity in diversity. Authors such as Campbell (1998, 2011), Granger (2010), Kupfer (1983) and Smuts (2005) reflect on the inherently inclusive and social nature of Dewey's aesthetic theory. Kupfer suggests that Dewey’s version of aesthetic experience prepares us for participation in the community:

The interdependence of distinctively developing individuals mirrors the form of the aesthetic object. . . . Each possesses a sort of individuality which nonetheless is what it is because of that part's relation to other parts within the whole. (p. 74)

Gale (2010) argues that for Dewey, “growth” was a signification of unity between self, others and the environment, contextually bound and rooted in the interactive process or rhythms of experience. Dewey claims, “Art renders men aware of their union with one another in origin and destiny” (p. 271). As Tan (1999) interprets, “What is expressed has been shaped by both the living and the dead; when expressed, it in turn shapes the experiences of the living and the unborn” (p. 114). Tan sees it as an act of “world-making” that is ethical and political (pp. 114-115).

In his exploration of the concept of personal and cultural renewal, Granger (2001, 2006) acknowledges the influence of Emerson and Wordsworth on Dewey in seeing renewal as an ever-expanding horizon that grows through the “ongoing process of marriage and remarriage with the world” (2006, pp. 208-209). He describes a “poetics
of self-creation” that echoes Sarbin’s “poetics of identity” (1997) and “poetic construction of reality” (1998b). In Sarbin’s view, the use of the term poetics implies that the self is created through a process of “making, fashioning, and configuring in the context of telling stories” (p. 297). Granger (2001) argues, “Self-making is only an initial step along the eventual path to self-remaking, entailing reciprocating activity within and beyond the habitual self (p. 109). This is a pragmatist view that aligns with postmodern performative and constructivist images of the self as not a fixed essential entity, but a fluid, evolving and culturally dependent set of behaviours, habits, beliefs and experiences (see Garrison, 1997, 1998, 2004; Granger; Sarbin, 1997, 2005). As Granger (2006) suggests, “Dewey’s aesthetics actively nurtures . . . the human eros: the native impulse to live life with an ever-expanding sense of meaning and value” (p. 3; see also Garrison, 1997, 2004). Garrison (1997) explains that this nurturing of eros is a far more social proposition than the more narcissistic versions of self-creation and self-actualisation that are characteristic of much postmodern thought (p. 147). “The idea of social self-creation involves learning to play creatively with others, especially those who are different from us” (p. 147). Personal and cultural renewal are therefore seen as embodied, interdependent processes of self- and world-creation.

Within my aesthetic frame, the resounding creative rhythm between self and world through which both are made and re-made will exemplify the art of participation. The art of participation is reflected in Dewey’s (1934) conception of “active and alert commerce with the world” (p. 19), and should be available equally to all in the context of a “unified collective life” (p. 81). In my view, applied theatre both embodies and describes this self-world rhythm, which I will consider more closely in the next chapter.

The Art of Process

Within the self-world interaction in Dewey’s (1934) theory is an acknowledgement of process as equally meaningful to product in the cycle of our experience: aesthetic experience is “inherently connected with the experience of making” (p. 49). He further clarifies, “Expression as personal act and as objective result are organically connected with each other” (p. 82). Dewey further draws attention to the unfortunate separation in our language between “artistic” and “aesthetic”. He argues, “The artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works” (p. 48), thereby bringing together the notions of production and consumption, artistry and aesthetic engagement; or as he puts it, the relationship, “between what is done and what is undergone” (p. 50). What is done and what is undergone hold equal value for Dewey in the creation of meaning and the potential for renewal:
Whenever anything is undergone in consequence of a doing, the self is modified. The modification extends beyond acquisition of greater facility and skill. Attitudes and interests are built up which embody in themselves some deposit of the meaning of things done and undergone. These funded and retained meanings become a part of the self. (p. 264)

Process becomes knowing. Kuehn (2005) states, “What Dewey offers is a sense of aesthetic experience based on integrated interaction instead of subjective reaction” (p. 198). Shusterman (2010) further explains: “For Dewey, the essence and value of art are not in the mere artefacts we typically regard as art, but in the dynamic and developing experiential activity through which they are created and perceived” (p. 25). As Stoller (2013) observes, “For Dewey, means and ends are interpenetrating and always in dialogical motion” (p. 28). Exploring the parallels between Dewey’s aesthetic theory and Taoism, Sartwell (2009) suggests, “Even Aristotle, and even the pragmatists, felt an urgency to collapse ends into means, to find meaning in the process as well as the products of living” (p. 30). Shusterman offers, “Because it exists as both noun and verb, ‘experience’ signifies both a completed event and a process; it also involves both immediacy and duration. Experience belongs to both life and art and is essential to both artist and audience” (p. 31).

Both Granger (2001, 2006, 2010) and Shusterman (2008b, 2009a, 2011a) explore Dewey’s (1934) notion of habit and the role that it plays in the ever-expanding process of renewal. Granger (2010) observes that for Dewey, habits are “arts” in the sense that they evolve as necessary responses to the environment; they are therefore, “expressions of culture rooted in the lived body and mediated by social interaction” (p. 72).

When past achievements and new horizons are brought fully to bear on a problematic situation, a broader field of imagined actions and meanings emerges. Present impulse and habit can then be reconstructed in an expansive, dynamic fashion. (Granger, 2006, pp. 230-231)

For Shusterman (2009a) the spontaneous is a product of habit that leads towards innovation and renewal. He cites Dewey (1982) in suggesting, “True spontaneity is henceforth not a birth-right but the last term, the consummated conquest, of an art - the art of conscious control’ through an enhanced, reflective awareness of our bodies” (p. 136). In his proposal for somaesthetics, Shusterman (2006b, 2008b, 2011a, 2011b, 2012) suggests that spontaneity alone cannot correct bad habits or facilitate renewal, but that there must be equal weight placed upon the more structured processes of reflection. “Dewey... affirms that the flourishing of conduct and thought requires the
multiple resources of spontaneous feelings and unreflective habits, not just reflective conscious control" (Shusterman, 2008b, p. 211). In this he invokes the rhythm between surrender and reflection as articulated in Dewey's conception of aesthetic experience: “We interrupt our yielding to the object to ask where it is leading and how it is leading there” (p. 144).

I will thus present the art of process as an embodied, dynamic rhythm between the artist and the artwork, between doing and undergoing, habit and renewal, surrender, spontaneity and reflection, means and ends. I would suggest that this principle is fundamental to applied theatre in all of its forms. As I will explore in the next chapters, applied theatre theory acknowledges aesthetic experience as an embodied, interactive process of spontaneous making and reflective perceiving that can lead to new forms of meaning and value.

The Art of Living

To gain an integrated individuality, each of us needs to cultivate his own garden. But there is no fence about this garden: it is no sharply marked-off enclosure. Our garden is the world, in the angle at which it touches our own manner of being . . . We, who are also parts of the moving present, create ourselves as we create an unknown future. (Dewey, 1929, as cited in Granger, 2006, p. 203)

This statement embodies the final principle that sits at the heart of my aesthetic frame – the art of living (see Alexander, 1998; Granger, 2006; Sartwell, 1995; Shusterman, 2006a, 2009b). This element of Dewey's (1934) philosophy positions it as “pragmatist aesthetics” (Shusterman, 2000b), where the goal of aesthetic theory is to enrich the human experience and help us to lead more fulfilling lives (p. 18) – to “cultivate our gardens.” Dewey recognised that ordinary non-artistic experience could be infused with aesthetic quality, and that art-based aesthetic experiences are integral to what we know and how we act in the world. Shusterman suggests,

In pragmatism . . . the aesthetic dimension is not separated from the ethical, the social, and the cognitive (even if for certain purposes it may be distinguishable from them), so the most beautiful lives cannot be lived in evil, isolation, or ignorance. (p. 23)

The sense of unity, the philosophy of “living aesthetically” and the position of the aesthetic at the centre of everyday “ordinary” experience and ethical conduct is, some have recognised, closely aligned to non-Western philosophies such as Japanese aesthetics (John, 2007) Confucianism (Grange, 2004; Shusterman, 2008b; Tan, 1999;
Wang, 2007), Zen Buddhism (Shusterman, 2000a, 2008b) and Taoism (Sartwell, 1995, 2009; Shusterman, 2008b). Sartwell’s (1995) exploration of the art of living in non-Western traditions recognises that they share “a veneration of the real and a sensitivity to the present moment that yields a heightened celebration of life as we live it” (p. xiii). In contrast, Smuts (2005) highlights Dewey’s use of the term “anesthetic” [sic] to describe an institutionalised, industrial modern world “deprived of meaning” (p. 97), a situation that can be healed by living aesthetically (Campbell, 2011, p. 27). Both Greene (1995) and Robinson (The Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce, 2010) have used this aesthetic/an-aesthetic wordplay to comment on how the Western education system effectively anaesthetises its children by depriving them of aesthetic experience. I would suggest that the same could be said for the Western penal system, which I will explore in more detail in the next chapter.

Granger’s (2001, 2006) poetics of personal and cultural renewal as described in the previous section is key to my conception of the art of living. The word renewal brings to my mind an image of regeneration and replenishment rather than complete transformation. Granger (2001) also draws attention to the narrative and imaginative nature of the renewal process in Dewey’s theory:

The habitual self must be reconstructed through conscious narrative deliberation. Dewey refers to this process as involving ‘a dramatic rehearsal (in imagination) of various competing lines of action.’ Dramatic rehearsal gives us the opportunity to experiment safely, ‘by tentative rehearsals in thought,’ with alternative possible ways of resolving blocked and conflicted habits. (Dewey, 1922, as cited in Granger, p. 109)

Bruner (1990), Sarbin (1997) and other narrative theorists recognise the ethical dimension of constructing coherent and meaningful life narratives. Following Dewey, both Johnson (2007) and Shusterman (2000a, 2000b, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012) recognise that aesthetic experience, personal renewal and cultural renewal are processes that are dependent upon the dynamic interplay between body, mind and culture. Both aestheticians wish to avoid the distinction between body and mind in the apprehension of meaning, with Johnson suggesting, “Philosophy needs a visceral connection to lived experience” (p. 262). Shusterman (2012) uses the Greek word ‘soma’ to signify “the living, sentient, purposive, perceptive intelligent body through which one perceives the world” (p. 7). He therefore conceives somaesthetics as an interdisciplinary program that “concerns the body as the locus of sensory aesthetic appreciation (aisthesis) and creative self-fashioning” (2006b, p. 2):
Besides grounding our social norms and moral values, the body is the essential medium or tool through which they are transmitted, inscribed, and preserved in society. Ethical codes are mere abstractions until they are given life through incorporation into bodily dispositions and action. (p. 6)

Shusterman's theory of somaesthetics is relatively new and has only recently begun to be tested and discussed by other scholars in philosophy and aesthetics. Ginot (2010) suggests that his work signals "an unprecedented recognition of somatics as a full-fledged and autonomous theoretical discipline" (p. 18), as opposed to being confined to the theory of dance. Shusterman (2000b) has been inspired principally by what he refers to as Dewey's "somatic naturalism" (p. 6), but also the work of Bourdieu, de Beauvoir, Foucault, James, Merleau-Ponty and Wittgenstein in conceiving the lived body, or soma, as site for sensory perception, cultural inscription and embodied expressions of selfhood (see also 2008b, 2011b). He describes his somaesthetics as "reflective body consciousness" (2008b): "A discipline that puts the body's experience and artful refashioning back into the heart of philosophy as an art of living" (p. 15), suggesting that this must be achieved through an interdisciplinary discourse that may allow for either an analytic or practical ameliorative orientation.

In this thesis, the art of living will therefore refer to how we might engage our whole bodies (or somas) in intentionally harnessing the dynamic flow of tensions and rhythms in experience. This involves the pragmatic pursuit of personal and cultural renewal through the process, participation and knowing that live within art-centred and ordinary aesthetic experience. This principle sits at the core of my project (and my practice in general): using drama to nurture aesthetic experience with the group (myself included), in the hope that we may lead more meaningful and ethical lives.

Conclusion

The arts of knowing, process, participation and living are all "varied colours" within the "river" of Dewey's (1934) philosophy of experience (p. 38), and they all help to bring the art of applied theatre into its flow. The meta-rhythm of life and art drums throughout both Dewey and Bruner's (1959, 1983, 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004) work, and the work of other thinkers that I have cited here. The rhythmic movement of experience towards consummation that may give it the unified quality of an experience has become the soundtrack to my exploration within Living Stories. That soundtrack has more rhythms and tensions that make up its complex beat, and those will be explored in the chapters that follow. Narrative is the lyrical element to the soundtrack,
contributing structure to its flow and the nuances of its meanings. Experience is done and undergone, and narrative frames and describes this doing and undergoing, therefore both are characterised by the same rhythms, tensions, interactions and points of consummation. Narrative is both container and content; it can both conceptually and expressively give form to our experience. Drama as an art form is inherently both narrative and aesthetic; and applied theatre in particular is a site in which there is a conscious exploration of the interplay between individuals and their world - between the ordinary and the artistic. According to Dewey's pragmatist philosophy, "Ideas must be tested in the crucible of lived experience if they are to affirm their worth" (Granger, 2006, p. 91). Also a pragmatist, Bruner (1991b) encourages the same (p. 21). In the chapters that follow, I will therefore explore the literature, methods and practices of applied theatre, prison theatre and specifically Living Stories through this lens. This lens has allowed me to embrace and explore the ways in which I manipulated and was moved by the rhythms and tensions within the work, how we made and remade ourselves and our world, and the ways in which applied theatre might engage us as an art of living.
Chapter 2. Applied Theatre as Experience: A review of literature

Introduction

This chapter comprises a review of literature using the theoretical lens that I have established in Chapter 1, as well as an expansion and development of that lens. Informed by John Dewey's *Art as Experience* (1934) and the narrative theory of Jerome Bruner (see 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b), along with a range of other scholars who have extended upon their theories, I have identified four key principles that flow into each other in the cycle of aesthetic experience: the art of knowing, the art of participation, the art of process and the art of living, and I have briefly touched upon how applied theatre might align with these. Through this chapter, I will explore this alignment in more detail, beginning with an overview of applied theatre literature in relation to this theory, and then analysing the field more closely through the four key principles. Within the scope of this review, I will also focus on prison theatre as a significant discipline area within applied theatre. Once again, I must acknowledge that there is a sense of artificiality in separating the four principles, however, I would suggest that it represents a useful way of surveying the field before undertaking the more holistic analysis of the project through the chapters that follow. Through this framework, I will continue to explore the rhythms and tensions that drive the dynamic flow of experience in applied theatre and prison theatre as described in the literature. I will focus specifically on emotion, spontaneity, role, and narrative as key experiential and expressive elements that have informed my study of the women's engagement in Living Stories. My focus on these particular elements has been driven by my interests as a practitioner-researcher and subsequently the kinds of engagement that I observed in the women through the course of the project. Viewing the field through this lens, I will propose applied theatre as an art of living — an embodied, narrative art that works intentionally within the self-world rhythm to move participants towards different forms of personal and cultural renewal. Renewal will be further explored as an aesthetic term: an ever-expanding horizon in which self and world are made and re-made through the creative process. Through this review, I have identified a number of areas in which the fields of applied theatre and prison theatre might be further developed, particularly in terms of extending the conversation about aesthetic engagement and experience.
The Aesthetic in Applied Theatre and Prison Theatre: An overview

In the introduction to this study, I have established my position in relation to the sometimes contentious term applied theatre, and the range of disciplines that have come to be gathered into its “web of performance practices” (Prendergast & Saxton, 2009, p. 6). Several scholars believe that the conversation about aesthetics in applied theatre has only recently been renewed after a period in which the focus was more on the utilitarian aspects of the work (see Balfour, 2009; Haseman & Winston, 2010; A. Jackson, 1999; Nicholson, 2013; Prentki & Preston, 2009; Schonmann, 2005). In the case of drama in education, Bowell and Heap (2010) argue, attention was also given to legitimising and defending the field’s position within the academy. Haseman and Winston argue that the previous neglect of aesthetics in applied theatre could also be due in part to its “conjuring up abstract and rarefied notions of taste, beauty and the sublime,” which are removed from the usual “gritty” and “dynamic” contexts common to the practice (p. 465). Threads of the conversation about aesthetics have continued, particularly via drama in education theory (see Bundy, 2003a, 2003b; Gallagher, 2005; A. Jackson, 1999, 2005), but the more significant “aesthetic turn” in applied theatre suggested by Haseman and Winston (p. 466) has been signalled by works such as Boal’s (2006) *The Aesthetics of the Oppressed*, which places more emphasis on his aesthetics of inclusion rather than the Marxist/Freirean politics of inclusion that underpinned his formative work; Winston’s (2006a, 2006b, 2010) exploration of beauty and ethical engagement in drama education; and Thompson’s (2009b) exploration of the tension between “effect” and “affect” in conceiving applied theatre practice. The “turn” has most recently been addressed directly through G. White’s (2015) edited volume *Applied Theatre: Aesthetics*. In all of this work, there is a sense of conviction that a distinction between “applied” and “pure” theatre is no longer useful or even relevant (see Nicholson, 2005, pp. 5-8; Shaughnessy, 2012, p. 9; G. White, p. 1), and that the instrumentalism of applied theatre is inherently bound together with its aesthetic power (see O’Connor & Anderson, 2015, p. 34).

Applied theatre’s long-standing instrumental focus has been strongly represented within prison theatre theory, with a sense that what underpins much theatre and drama practice in prisons is its humanising potential (see Balfour, 2004; McAvinchey, 2011; Shailor, 2011; Thompson, 1998; Tocci, 2007). Some see this through the lens of rehabilitation theory, using models from psychology and criminology to inform therapeutic work with prisoners (see Baim, 2004; Baim, Allam, Eames, Dunford, & Hunt, 1999; Baim et al., 2002; Balfour, 2000; Balfour & Poole,
1998; Goldstein, Glick, Carthan, & Blancero, 2004; Goodrich, 2004; Hughes & Ruding, 2009; Mountford & Farrall, 1998; Stamp, 1998; Watson, 2009). Others see the radical possibilities (and problems) in working with a definitively marginal group to achieve resistance, empowerment and social change (see Billone, 2009; Clark, 2004; Heritage, 2004a; Heritage, 2004b; Kershaw, 2004; Thompson, 2000, 2001; Weaver, 2009). And others engage prisoners as potential artists with a holistic and sometimes educative view to developing their creative voices and potential as human beings (see Buell, 2011; Moller, 2003, 2004; Williams, 2003). A strong tradition has also been established of using Shakespeare’s plays as a way for prisoners to engage with complex human themes (see Bates, 2011; M. Cox, 1998; Heard et al., 2013; O’Connor & Mullen, 2011; Tofteland, 2011; Wilcox, 2011). Within these, there are a number of projects and practices that reflect the approach that I took in some parts of Living Stories, where practitioners work with prisoners to develop performance that is wholly or in part informed by their own life experiences (Clark; Gladstone & McLevin, 1998; Heritage; McKean, 2006; Rolling, 2013; Sepinuck, 2011; Weaver, 2009). As O’Connor and Mullen observe, prison theatre has become a broad, interdisciplinary field, with many of the practitioners cited here crossing over between these different approaches to the work. In many of these examples, it is possible to get a glimpse, and sometimes considerable detail, about the overall aesthetic approaches being used. But as G. White (2015) notes in applied theatre more broadly, the term aesthetic “stands for a broad category of the artistic or the art-like” (p. 5). Aside from Bottoms’ (2010) analysis of Geese Theatre Company’s performance and workshop program Journeywoman, I have found very little, if any exploration of aesthetic experience and engagement for the participants and audiences involved in prison theatre.

The absence of rigorous analysis of aesthetic theory in the field of prison theatre has likely been caused by some of the same factors that have influenced the utilitarian focus in applied theatre as a whole. From my own and others’ experiences, the need to secure funding and to raise prison theatre’s credibility in criminal justice settings often contributes to the perpetuation of this instrumental focus (see Balfour, 2004, 2009; Hughes & Ruding, 2009; McAvinchey, 2011; Omasta & Snyder-Young, 2014; Peaker, 1998). As G. White (2015) observes, “The practitioner whose work is predicated on the social good that it can achieve is inevitably bound to the material systems that sustain it” (p. 3). Hughes’ (2005) extensive review of literature and practice within the arts in criminal justice in the United Kingdom describes the arts being seen as an “intervention” that augments the other rehabilitative programs on offer. As such, the
behavioural and cultural changes that occur to individuals and institutions through the arts are often described using frameworks from psychology and criminology, rather than the field developing "its own body of theory from which arts-specific models of change can be identified" (p. 13). Hughes does not mention aesthetics or aesthetic engagement in her review of prison theatre practice, but her call for arts-specific models of change seems to me a call to return to the aesthetic, for this, in my view, is where such versions of change exist - not as models, but as aesthetic qualities that are inherent to the form.

Prendergast and Saxton (2009) describe the aesthetic in applied theatre as being based on nurturing aesthetic experience in participants through the process; recognising the aesthetic for integral audiences; the art of making the ordinary extraordinary; and the pursuit of authenticity, that is, harnessing the power in community stories and raw, sometimes unskilled performances. Although G. White (2015) remains sceptical that there exists a singular applied theatre aesthetic (p. 11), Prendergast and Saxton's summary reflects some of the more detailed exploration of the aesthetics of applied theatre in his recent volume. Shaughnessy (2015) proposes a "new aesthetics" that reflects socially engaged contemporary practices – an embodied, "relational and socially situated aesthetics" (p. 97) as conceived by contemporary aestheticians such as Armstrong (2000), S. Jackson (2011), Lutterbie (2013), Minissale (2013) and Wolff (2008). Sadeghi-Yekta (2015) recognises the cultural situation of the aesthetic, exploring the impact of the historical and cultural context of Cambodia – its "ethnoscape" – on the art that is made in a Northern Cambodian arts centre. Heap (2015) advocates for the "aesthetic strengthening" of participants, whereby teacher/facilitators must nurture "greater understanding of the many aesthetic variables which operate when working in the art form of drama" (p. 249). Hickey-Moody (2015) argues for a "political aesthetics" in engaging young people via media, technology and popular culture, embracing Peter Brook's Rough Theatre as an aesthetic frame.

The aesthetic theory that informs my study positions applied theatre as a democratic process in which participants are similarly empowered as both makers and perceivers of the work – percipients (G. M. Bolton, 1984; O'Toole, 1992) or spectators (Boal, 1985, 1995). This view of the aesthetic has been perhaps best articulated over the years within the field of drama and theatre in education, where the emphasis is placed upon aesthetic engagement as integral to learning for children and young people (see Anderson & Dunn, 2013; G. M. Bolton; Booth & Gallagher, 2003; Bundy, 2003a, 2003b; Dunn, Bundy & Stinson, 2015; Dunn, Bundy & Woodrow, 2012; Gallagher, 2005; A. Jackson, 1999, 2005; Morgan & Saxton, 1989; Neelands, 2010; O'Connor,
2013; O'Neill, 1995; O'Toole, 1992; O'Toole & Dunn, 2002; Taylor & Warner, 2006, Wagner, 1976). Within this field, a small number of practitioners and theorists has either overtly acknowledged Dewey in conceptualising their work, or else their work implicitly reflects a Deweyan concept of aesthetic experience (see Bundy, 2003a, 2003b; Gallagher; O'Neill; Taylor & Warner). While applied theatre is not always drama or theatre in education, as I will explore in detail below, it is almost always educative in terms of its position as an art of knowing, and ethical as an art of living. As such, the field of aesthetic education provides a strong base from which to continue the conversation about art-centred aesthetic experience in applied theatre. If there is to be a turn (or a turn back) towards the aesthetic in applied theatre, then I join Rasmussen (2010) and Rasmussen and Gürgens (2006) in suggesting that Dewey's pragmatic aesthetic theory is one with which we can revitalise the exploration of applied theatre's unique aesthetic qualities, without compromising the political, emancipatory and pluralist dialogues that have helped to position the field. G. White (2015) suggests that Thompson's (2009b) emphasis on the affective experience over the effects of applied theatre is reminiscent of Dewey's aesthetics (p. 9). In framing aesthetics in relation to the field of applied theatre, G. White (2015) presents Dewey's pragmatist aesthetic theory as one that "prioritises the continuity and heteronomy of art" (p. 43); and he introduces Shusterman's somaesthetics as an "updated" version of Dewey's pragmatism that might be relevant in an exploration of the aesthetic in applied theatre (pp. 74-77).

I believe that there is unique potential in exploring the aesthetic within prison theatre, where aesthetic engagement and experience are informed by their situation within an often-alienating institutional space. Kershaw (2004), McAvinchey, (2011) and O'Connor and Mullen (2011) begin to discuss prison theatre in these terms, where the tensions between the institutional context and the moments of freedom, beauty or transcendence that occur in the drama space become integral to the aesthetic. In commenting on the institutionalisation of modern society, Dewey (1934) observed, "Prestige goes to those who use their minds without participation of the body and who act vicariously through control of the bodies and labour of others" (p. 21). As Smuts (2005) suggests, Dewey made a distinction between work, which has meaning, and monotonous labour, which is "mechanical in nature and unrewarding" (Smuts, 2005, p. 101). Alexander (1998) argues that in Dewey's view, "Art, when placed in its natural, ecological context, points the way for the liberation of the sensuous human body from its institutionalised alienation" (p. 13). If society in the 1930s was for Dewey "anaesthetic" (see Smuts), or characterised by institutionalised alienation, I am
compelled to view most contemporary prisons in the same way. The prison system is built upon the control of prisoners, who are commonly forced to undertake labour, as opposed to work; whose bodies are certainly not liberated (even within the confines of the prison walls); and who are largely prevented from having, “active and alert commerce with the world” (Dewey, p. 19). Foucault (1991) explores this idea through the concept of “docile bodies” in his seminal analysis of society’s development towards modern forms of imprisonment. Writing from a feminist perspective, Easteal (2001) describes the “dysfunctional culture” within Australian women’s prisons, where all levels of the institution, women are encouraged to adopt the survival strategies that they have learned growing up in abusive and dysfunctional homes: “Don’t talk, don’t trust and don’t feel.” Geese Theatre Company’s “Fragment Masks” represent a taxonomy of eight coping behaviours that are found in the overarching “mask” of survival within the prison environment and in other areas of offenders’ lives (Baim et al., 2002, pp. 184-185; Watson, 2009, p. 53). One of these masks, the “brick wall”, directly echoes Eastal’s triad of negative coping behaviours. Looking at the prison environment in terms of Shusterman’s (2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012) somaesthetics, these embodied, often dysfunctional habits might be ameliorated through practices that facilitate different forms of somatic training, engagement and awareness.

As stated in the previous chapter, narrative has been incorporated into my theoretical lens as integral to the aesthetic in applied theatre, and I will now give it some consideration in my overview of the field. Peterson and Langellier (2007) propose that there should be a “performative turn” to narrative theory that explores, “the behaviours, habits, practices, and institutions which enact, execute, or do narrative” (p. 206). It is through the study of drama, largely via Aristotle’s Poetics (2006) that performance has long been implicit, and sometimes made explicit, within narrative theory. Bruner used a dramatic metaphor to describe our progress through the “somewhat open plot” of human life (1990, p. 34). Burke (1969) used dramatic terms (dramatism, act, scene, agent, agency and purpose) to create a framework that integrated performance and narrative structure in his exploration of human motivation. Sarbin (1986, 2003) built on ideas from Burke (1945) and Goffman (1959) his integration of role theory and narrative theory in social constructivist psychology. As Ricoeur (1984) claimed, “There is no structural analysis of narrative that does not borrow from an explicit or an implicit phenomenology of ‘doing something’” (p. 56). Turner’s (1981) concept of “social dramas” appeared in Mitchell’s collection On Narrative, wherein he traced the linguistic roots of the word narrative to define it as “knowledge emerging from action” or
“experiential knowledge” (p. 163). If narrative is seen as the skeleton that holds up our understanding of experience, then performance can be seen as the muscle tissue that brings that understanding to life. In her contribution to a theory of applied theatre, Nicholson (2005) presents a relatively brief and rare description of the field informed by narrative theory. Applied theatre is a place where we “do narrative” in the meta-performative sense that Peterson and Langellier describe; and where we perform narratives through a range of dramatic forms and structures.

Scholars such as Balfour (2009), E. Cox (2008), Jeffers (2008), Salverson (2009) and Thompson (2009b) warn against the uncritical perpetuation of an aesthetic of injury or narratives of trauma or victimhood that have the potential to disempower participants and limit the scope of possibility for the audience. Certain areas of the prison theatre field remain characterised by such narratives, or else by heartfelt, yet often uncritical narratives of transformation, redemption and even salvation (see Shailor’s edited collection Performing New Lives, 2011). In this sense, prison theatre scholarship might to a certain degree remain in the grip of the same kinds of “hero narratives” that O’Connor and Mullen (2011) suggest were typical of early applied theatre scholarship (p. 134). Popular representations of the arts in prisons such as The Choir (Davie, 2007) and Jail Birds (Permezel, 2009) focus on similarly uncritical stories of transformation and the redemptive power of the arts. I would suggest that narrative therefore offers a promising direction for inquiry in the aesthetics of prison theatre, not only in exploring within the work, but also in challenging some of the prevailing narratives that exist in the prison theatre literature. Foucault (1991) notes the “introduction of the ‘biographical’” into the history of penology. He describes modern prisons that are concerned with rehabilitation as “a sort of artificial and coercive theatre,” in which the prisoner’s life and biography “will be examined from top to bottom” in order to find causality for their criminality (pp. 251-252). 40 years later, would suggest that the contemporary prison context is still underscored by the notion of narrative, where prisoners’ life stories are recounted, documented and examined as they move through the system from conviction to parole and release.

In this section I have offered a broad overview of the fields of applied theatre and prison theatre in terms of aesthetics in general, and more specifically the aesthetic theory that I have outlined in Chapter 1. In the sections that follow, I will review the field more closely using the four key principles that I have identified as underpinning my aesthetic frame: The art of knowing, the art of participation, the art of process and the art of living.
The Art of Knowing

In the previous chapter, I have described the art of knowing as the embodied apprehension of meaning and value in aesthetic experience that leads to different forms of personal and cultural renewal. According to Dewey (1934), this is driven by aesthetic emotion: the complex integration of cognition, imagination and emotion that occurs when an experience’s rhythms and tensions drive it towards consummation or qualitative unity. In this section I will explore Dewey’s concept of aesthetic emotion in relation to applied theatre, and how this is characterised by the integration of the various rhythms and tensions within the forms that influence my practice. Underpinning these concepts is the notion of the whole living body, or soma as a site for knowing (see Dewey; Johnson, 2007; Shusterman, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012), and the understanding that knowing is not fenced off from the other three principles of process, participation and living, but flows through these in the cycle of the applied theatre experience. As a mode of thought and expression (see Bruner, 1990, 1991b), narrative possesses its own power to aesthetically engage, and in drama, “doing narrative” (Peterson & Langellier, 2007, p. 206) can itself bring about new forms of knowing (see Nicholson, 2005). I would suggest that alongside narrative, role is another key mode of expression in applied theatre, the performance of which interacts with performances of self in the cycle of experience and knowing (see G. M. Bolton, 1984; Landy, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994; Moreno, 1975; O’Neill, 1995; O’Toole, 1992; Wagner, 1976).

Dewey’s (1934) concept of “aesthetic emotion” (p. 79) parallels many of the theories that underpin aesthetic experience and knowing in applied theatre. There is widespread acknowledgement in aesthetic fields that meaning in experience is apprehended (or constructed) through an imaginative process that integrates cognition or reason with emotion (see Abbs, 1989; Best, 1992; Dewey; G. M. Bolton, 1984; Bruner, 1986; Bundy, 2003a, 2003b; Courtney, 1995; Gallagher, 2005; Greene, 1995; A. Jackson, 2005; Johnson, 2007; Taylor & Warner, 2006; van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994; Witkin, 1974), with considerable variation in how these theorists define emotion, and express the nuances of this integration. Emotion will be discussed in further detail below, however for Dewey, aesthetic emotion occurs when an experience’s rhythms and tensions drive it towards consummation or qualitative unity – not, I would suggest, in the sense of cause and effect, but in a holistic sense, whereby aesthetic emotion lives within what Shusterman (2010) refers to as an experience’s “organisation of vital energies” (p. 28). O’Neill (1995) draws upon Dewey in recognising the primacy of
pattern and rhythm in shaping dramatic events so that there is a sense of "unfolding": "The dramatic event . . . is filled with physical, emotional and intellectual tensions, all of which give quality to the passage of time" (p. 101). The most obvious of these tensions is between the fictive world of the drama, and the actual world in which it is contextually bound: as Prentki (2009) observes, "The applied theatre facilitator, in the European tradition of the stage fool . . . plays along the edges of art and life to expose contradictions and invite reflections upon the theatrical in life and the lively in theatre." (p. 253). Following Aristotle (2006) many, including Bruner (2004), Turner (1981), Goffman (1969), Burke (1969) and Oscar Wilde (1891, as cited in Feagin & Maynard, 1997, pp. 40-45; Bruner, 2004, p. 692), have explored the 'ife imitates art imitates life conundrum. Our rhythmic movement between the artistic-actual or fictional-factual therefore creates alternative versions of reality or truth which might inform our understanding of self and world, and Bruner (1991b) argues that these are made manifest in our understanding and expression of experience through narrative: "Narrative 'truth' is judged by its verisimilitude rather than its verifiability" (p. 13). This he also describes as the "shadowy epistemology" of the story, operating, "In the domain midway between the real and the imaginary" (1990, p. 55).

Drama reflects this shadowy epistemology in an immediate and embodied sense. Thanks to G. M. Bolton (1984, 1985) and O'Toole (1992), Boal's (1995) use of the term metaxis has become a significant concept in the aesthetics of drama in education. It is widely held that aesthetic engagement and therefore knowing in participatory and educational drama is dependent on metaxis (see Allern, 2001; G. M. Bolton; Bundy, 2003a; Cahill, 2010; Jackson & Leahy, 2005; Linds, 2006; O'Connor, 2009; O'Neill, 1995; O'Toole; Perry, 2012). Boal (1995) describes metaxis as "'the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two different, autonomous worlds: the image of reality and the reality of the image'" (p. 43). He further suggests, "The human being not only 'makes' theatre: it is theatre" (p. 13). Linds describes Boal's conception of metaxis as having its origins in Plato (1994):

'All spirits occupy the middle ground [metaxu] between humans and gods. As mediators between the two, they fill the remaining space, and so make the universe an interconnected whole.' . . . Plato underlines that metaxu is a dynamic space between two separate things where mediation keeps the universe together. (p. 114)

Boal's joker, like the stage fool described by Prentki (2009) acts as the spirits do in the translation of Plato's description: mediating between the worlds of imagination and
reality. The “interconnected whole” of the universe reflects Dewey’s (1934) conception of qualitative unity in aesthetic experience, an integration of the rhythms and tensions that exist within the art-life duality.

Within this fundamental duality, a number of theorists have extended upon Boal’s concept to create a varied picture of metaxis as it operates in participatory and educational drama. Allern (2001) traces the etymology of the word metaxis, suggesting that there is significant confusion as to whether its origins are in the word *metaxu* as described above, or in *methexis* - which reflects the idea of participation and communion in ritual and drama, between the world of ideas and the world of materiality. He argues that the latter is a closer representation of G. M. Bolton (1984), O’Neill (1995) and O’Toole’s (1992) usage, and connects directly to *mimesis*. Both Bolton and O’Toole evoke its emotional quality, relating it to Vygotsky’s notion of “dual affect”, wherein the strong emotions experienced in a game are “tempered by the pleasure of knowing ‘it’s only a game’” (Bolton, p. 106; see also O’Connor, 2007, pp. 3-4). Bolton describes the paradox that in order to invest in the fictional world of the drama, one must recognise it as fiction (pp. 107-108). O’Toole describes role as being the clearest manifestation of metaxis, as percipients negotiate the fictional and real contexts of the drama (p. 68). For him, metaxis represents the tension between fiction and reality as it occurs in the state of dual affect (p. 166). O’Neill returns to Boal’s (1979, 1990) notion of the spectactor in referring to the coexistence of the audience and performer functions – observation and involvement – in process drama (pp. 119-120). Jackson and Leahy (2005) similarly cite Boal (1995) in suggesting that metaxis is the “ability to be both inside and outside the fiction simultaneously” (p. 316). In the context of a historical drama for children, they further describe this as “the ability to be both ‘here’ and ‘there’, ‘now’ and ‘then’ simultaneously” (p. 318). This brings a spatial and temporal quality to metaxis, where the participant can act both here and now, and in another time and place, reflecting Turner’s (1982) concept of the liminality of ritual and play. Perry (2012) cites Boal (1995) in suggesting that through image theatre, participants are “grounded in the aesthetic space (the image of reality) while simultaneously articulating and reflecting on how their aesthetic creations are rooted in the social world (the reality of the image)” (p. 114). Here Perry alludes to the integration between the aesthetic and the social/political that drives Boal’s work. O’Connor (2009) suggests that in Everyday Theatre, metaxis occurs when the children play out aspects of their own lives through the vehicle of a fictional family (p. 589). Bundy (2003a) similarly relates metaxis to the juxtaposition that occurs between the drama and the personal experience of participants (pp. 177-178). “Aesthetic engagement always involves contrast emerging through the metaxis of
elements from within and external to the stage or workshop action” (p. 178). Bundy, like O'Toole, implies that metaxis describes not only the state of being in-between, but the sense of tension that this situation brings about. For Bundy, aesthetic engagement in drama “always involves metaxis” (p. 180).

In drama therapy, metaxis appears through different terminology that nevertheless reflects the same qualities. Landy (1994) describes the “dramatic paradox”, where participants are invited to simultaneously be themselves and not themselves (p. 5). Blatner (2000) suggests, “Psychodrama utilises and cultivates imagination, symbolic representation, and also the ability to shift back and forth between the realms of imagination and ordinary reality” (p. 89). Emunah (1994) explains that in drama therapy, it is drama’s ability to offer both distance and connection that makes it a safe, yet powerful ground in which to explore difficult experiences and feelings. Landy (2001) describes this as “aesthetic distance”: “The paradox of ‘actor/observer’ or ‘me/not me’ allows people to face frightening feelings that have been repressed because the client is able to achieve this distance” (pp. 214-215). In summary, I would suggest that metaxis represents the life-art rhythm in applied theatre, and the various tensions that exist within it. As such, it very closely reflects Dewey’s (1934) view of aesthetic experience. Participants experience aesthetic engagement in applied theatre when they experience metaxis: an embodied tension or paradoxical state that exists between imagination-reality, self-role, perceiver-object, doing-undergoing. It represents a “heightened state of consciousness” (G.M. Bolton, 1984, p. 142) that I would suggest has physical, emotional, intellectual, spatial, temporal, political and spiritual qualities – conducting participants’ passage through the tensions and rhythms of the universe. Linds (2006) suggests, “The notion of embodiment is central to understanding this in-between state because meaning emerges through our bodies acting in a metaxic space” (p. 114). Following Shusterman (2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012), it is this somatic experience of metaxis that might form an integral part of the somaesthetic potential of participatory forms of theatre.

The Art of Participation

Like all of the principles described here, I see the art of process and the art of participation as overlapping: Within the process, there is participation; and participation is itself a process. Separating them out here is counter-intuitive, but I am attempting to do so in order to survey the field of applied theatre as a democratic, participatory art before delving further into the processes that make it so. Whereas G. White (2015)
proposes an overall "aesthetics of participation" (pp. 44-49) that acknowledges the difficult, unresolved and dynamic processes that characterise much applied theatre; for me the art of participation is exemplified by Dewey's (1934) resounding creative rhythm between self and world through which both might experience renewal. This can be seen as a pivotal principle within applied theatre. As White suggests, Dewey's theory "puts very few boundaries around the idea of art, what it is, or who makes it" (p. 4), an idea that can be found throughout the avant-garde, neo avant-garde, radical political and progressive education movements of the early to mid 20th century that are widely seen to have influenced applied theatre practices (see Nicholson, 2005; Prendergast & Saxton, 2009; Prentki & Preston, 2009; Shaughnessy, 2012; G. White, 2015). Whether the goal of the work is educative, political, celebratory or therapeutic, the form is invariably used for some version of self- and world-making that is undertaken by group members in collaboration with each other, and in embodied, "active and alert commerce" (Dewey, p. 19) with the cultural contexts in which they experience the work. Granger's (2001, 2006, 2010) work as mentioned in the previous chapter describes a poetics of personal and cultural renewal, wherein acts of self-creation are culturally situated (see also Sarbin, 1997). I see this as pivotal to the art of participation in applied theatre.

As discussed in the previous chapter, many Deweyan scholars have explored the communal aspects of his aesthetic theory, drawing out his conviction that aesthetic experience is integral to active community life (see Campbell, 1998, 2011; Granger, 2010; Kupfer, 1983; Smuts, 2005). Similarly, Bakhurst and Shanker (2001) suggest that Bruner's rebellion against the cognitive revolution arose out of recognition that the mind and self must be understood not in isolation, but as "aspects of a social world" (pp. 10-11). This rhythm is key within applied theatre and performance theory, which explicitly or implicitly, deals with the personal experiences of individuals and how these interact with the group, and the wider communities and cultures in which they are situated (see Nicholson, 2005; Prendergast & Saxton, 2009; Prentki & Preston, 2009). O'Toole's (1992) diagram outlining the elements of dramatic form describes a contextually bound dynamic experience that generates meanings which, in turn, have an impact on the contexts in which they emerge (p. 6). Bundy (2003b) suggests that through aesthetic experience in drama, "We are more aware of ourselves, of the world around us and of the relationship between the two" (p. 1). Some forms of reminiscence theatre provide a particularly strong point of reference for the community-based performance of individual and collectivised personal narratives (see Prendergast &
Saxton, 2009, pp. 169-183; Schwiezer, 2007, pp. 15-16). Within therapeutic drama forms there exists a small number of accounts of group performances, with Emunah’s (1994) Beyond Analysis representing both the individual and collective stories and identities of participants who suffered from mental illness. Boal’s Theatre of the Oppressed (1985) draws upon the lived experience of individual participants to construct shared or community narratives for social and political debate. Some practitioners and scholars are concerned with how the narratives that are explored in community-based forms of theatre interact with the government driven meta-narratives that surround them in sites such as post-genocide Rwanda (Breed, 2015; Thompson, 2009a) and post-apartheid South Africa (Heddon, 2008). Both McAvinchey (2011) and Thompson (2000, 2001, 2004) recognise the potential for the meta-performances of discipline and punishment at a societal level to interact with the performances that occur in prison theatre.

The art of participation in applied theatre is therefore underpinned by a poetics of self- and world-creation, in which selves and worlds are made and re-made in the context of the cultural and societal meta-narratives and meta-performances that contain the practice. Here, once again, there is a sense of bleeding between participation and process, but for now I will erect a problematic and arbitrary fence to close of the art of participation as signifying the egalitarian, contextually bound co-creation of selves and worlds that I believe is at the heart of applied theatre.

**The Art of Process**

Continuing with the rhythmic quality of aesthetic experience, the art of process has been described in the previous chapter as an embodied, dynamic rhythm between the perceiver and the artwork, between doing and undergoing, surrender, spontaneity and reflection, ends and means. Knowing and participation in applied theatre have been described above as dependent upon an interactive process of making and perceiving across its artistic and actual frames. In this section, I will expand on this by exploring the expressive elements of role, emotion, spontaneity and narrative as they operate within the applied theatre process.

For Dewey (1934), the knowing that leads to renewal is dependent upon the symbiosis between doing and undergoing in aesthetic experience. Dewey’s emphasis on both process and the product in aesthetic experience has informed Taylor and Warner’s (2006) analysis of “dynamic form” in O’Neill’s process drama, likening in to Dewey’s concept of an experience (p. 61). Practitioners of process drama intentionally work to manipulate the elements of drama within a particular structure in order to achieve this
dynamic form (see Haseman & O'Toole, 1986). Yet this conception of dynamic form can equally be used to explore other applied theatre approaches. C. Johnston's (1998) "six polarities" of community drama practice indicate a constantly shifting dynamic between binaries such as "surface and depth," "centre and edge," and "the simple and the complex" (pp. 24-45). Describing a community-based applied theatre project, Rasmussen and Gürgens (2006) offer useful distinction between the "art work" (process) and the "artwork" (product), emphasising the aesthetic that exists in both. They describe the "eminence" of the aesthetic experience for participants, where there was no "splendid art work" created: "The feeling of eminence is not necessarily dependent on the objective quality of the art work, but rather on the experience of being part of a practice that goes beyond everyday life" (p. 237). As G. White (2015) argues, "An aesthetics of process suggests the value of working through, motivated by an end point of some kind, but not necessarily arriving conclusively at that end point, and that this working through is an aesthetic experience in its own right" (p. 47). White suggests that the practices and experiences of participation should be valued as art works (p. 46). A program such as Living Stories can be seen in Deweyan terms as an experience, within which there may be numerous objective art works created; and numerous experiences, both art-centred and ordinary; with all of these forming part of a larger, integrated whole. What participants do and undergo in applied theatre depends largely on the different forms and structures that are used in any given project. It is beyond the scope of my study to comprehensively interrogate all of these in terms of the art of process in the literature. I have identified role and narrative as expressive structures that are of particular interest in my study. Within this, I will explore also how emotion and spontaneity are key instruments of process that inform how participants engage with these structures.

**Role**

In applied theatre, I conceive role as an embodied mode of expression that is performed between and across the actual and artistic frames: in the meta-performative sense, and in the performances that occur in the context of the drama. Rather than conceive role in terms of theories of acting, I have incorporated aspects of role theory (see Blatner, 2000; Emunah, 1994; Landy, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994; Moreno, 1975), performance theory (see Goffman, 1969; Heddon, 2008; Heddon & Milling, 2006; Schechner, 2003) and drama in education theory (G. M. Bolton, 1984; Morgan & Saxton, 1989; O'Neill, 1995; O'Toole, 1992; Taylor & Warner, 2006; Wagner, 1976), to understand how self and role operate as "objects" in the Deweyan (1934) subject-object
rhythm of the creative process. Drawing on Dewey's (1922) conception of habits as being “arts” that we develop in order to respond to our environment, Granger (2001) suggests, “The expansive, dynamic self is fittingly viewed as a poetic construction,” (p. 111; see also Sarbin, 1997) wherein there exists the potential for expansion past habit towards renewal. This poetic view of self-making ties in with the teatro mundi view of performance theorists such as Goffman wherein the self is seen as a “performed role” (Heddon, p. 39) that acts in the unfolding drama of our lives (see also O'Toole, p. 69; O'Neill, p. 225; Sarbin, 1997, 1998b, 2003). Bruner (1990) describes the need to focus not just on the meanings that make up selfhood (individually and in the context of a culture) but also on the practices, or one could say performances, that express that selfhood (pp. 116-7); later describing this process as “troubled”, “unstable” and “a shaky enterprise” (2004, p. 693). Similarly, Nicholson (2005) cites Brah (1996) in articulating a narrative version of identity that is fluid and “becoming” rather than fixed or “being” (see also Fischer & Goblirsch, 2007; Kraus, 2007; Schiff, 2007). She suggests that this fluid version of identity evolves through agentic acts of creation and re-creation in interaction with others. Role theory holds that within this fluid notion of self lies the potential to perform a range of roles that serve particular functions that are driven by “personal motivation and social relationships” (Landy, 1994, p. 31; see also 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993). Such roles can therefore be seen as habits – the embodied “arts” in the poetics of self-creation (Granger, 2001, 2006, 2010).

In addition to the performance or “presentation of self in everyday life” (Goffman, 1969), applied theatre forms such as Theatre of the Oppressed, community-based, reminiscence and testimonial theatre regularly call upon participants to perform versions of self and personal narrative in the artistic frame. These forms reflect fluid versions of self that can be conceived in relation to other unstable elements such as community, memory and trauma (see Bundy, 2006b; E. Cox, 2008; Govan, Nicholson, & Normington, 2007; Heddon & Milling, 2006; Jeffers, 2008; Nicholson, 2003; Woodland, 2009). A.-M. Taylor (2000) suggests that this unstable view of self and role in performance was initially influenced by Brecht and can be seen in the autobiographical work of contemporary performance artists such as Elisabeth le Compte, Pina Bausch and Robert Wilson (p. 249; see also Heddon, 2008). The performance of a fluid identity also underpins therapeutic drama forms such as drama therapy and psychodrama. Blatner (2000) defines Moreno’s (n.d.) term surplus reality as the “what if” elements of a person’s identity and life story – their hopes, dreams, projections and fantasies – all of which might be enacted to assist the psychotherapeutic
The term *role repertoire* is used in psychodrama to underpin processes that explore the multitude of possible roles (whether fictional or actual) that one might play in life, and therefore may also be enacted in the therapeutic drama encounter (see Baim et al., 2002; Emunah, 1994; Landy, 1994, 2001). These roles are sometimes conceived along side the metaphor of the “mask,” the outward behaviour that serves the role and its function (see Baim et al.; Landy; Watson, 2009). For Geese Theatre Company, the self is explored as an interaction between what is on the surface of the mask, what lies beneath it, and what more effective roles might be added to the repertoire of the participant through the process of dramatic enactment (Baim et al.; Watson).

Drawing on these theories, I am therefore suggesting that applied theatre deals with the performance of self in everyday life, and the performance of self in the artistic frame. However, many forms of applied theatre also invite participants into performances of *others,* whether these are the fictional roles that are taken in process drama, the characters depicted in text-based and devised performances, or the significant others enacted in Theatre of the Oppressed and therapeutic drama processes (for example bosses, family members, victims, partners, oppressors). Drama education theories as expressed by G. M. Bolton (1984), Heathcote (Wagner, 1976), Morgan and Saxton (1989), O'Neill (1995) and O'Toole (1992) articulate various ways to distinguish between different acting behaviours such as dramatic play, mantle of expert, role-play, characterisation and acting. O'Neill sees role in process drama on a continuum between “simplicity of representation” to “complete identification” (O'Neill, p. 69); with engagement in the drama ranging from “generalised involvement” to “dynamic participation” (O'Neill, p. 77). Morgan and Saxton distinguish between various categories of identification, distinguishing between *role playing,* where participants address the drama adopting certain values or points of view (p. 32); *characterizing,* which is the “communication of a representation of a lifestyle,” expressing more fully the inner thoughts and feelings of the role (p. 33); and *acting,* in which participants “convey subtleties of nuance and gesture” (p. 34) to “transfer what is happening on stage to the audience in such a way as they see only the character and not the person who is playing the character” (p. 35). However, O'Neill suggests that process drama does not necessarily follow the “implied hierarchy” of these categories, but shifts around (p. 81). Although this distinction has been articulated in terms of process drama with children, I would suggest that these three acting behaviours are relevant to many forms of applied theatre, and certainly to the performance of role, as it existed in Living Stories. O'Neill refers to the performance of role as an embodiment of a “type of humanity as much as
an individual” (p. 76). Gallagher (2005) observes: “One of the significant ways in which the players of drama engage aesthetically is through critically examining and physically embodying their own and others’ sensuous perceptions and interpretations of a shared world” (p. 93). As such, the soma, as the expressive medium, embodies the integrative rhythm between self, role and world.

**Emotion**

Dewey (1934), influenced by William James, recognised the primacy of emotion in aesthetic experience, and began to explore its nuances within the artistic process of creation and perception. Dewey makes very few references to drama or theatre in his treatise, however, in a rare statement about acting, he recognises the state of metaxis that exists in the making and perceiving of role, linking this directly to emotion:

> If there is art in acting, the role is subordinated so as to occupy the position of a part in the whole. It is therefore qualified by aesthetic form. Even those who feel most poignantly the emotions of the character represented do not lose consciousness that they are on a stage where there are other actors taking part; that they are before an audience; and that they must, therefore, cooperate with other players in creating a certain effect. These facts demand and signify a definite transformation of the primitive emotion. (p. 80)

In this statement, he acknowledges how emotion is moved from its “primitive” form, towards what G. M. Bolton (1984), citing Tormey (1971) describes as “representation” (p. 117). This conception of emotion reflects the idea proposed by Johnson (2007) that “emotions are both subjective and objective at the same time” (p. 67). Bolton outlines a difference between the “dramatic playing mode” which is outwardly characterised by emotional expression, and the “dramatic performance mode” which is outwardly characterised by emotional representation. Bolton supports Dewey’s assertion further in describing the nature of role as an embodiment of the rhythm between doing and undergoing emotion:

> It can be argued that the art of the actor is but a sophisticated reflection of what occurs in all human action: a struggle between what is privately felt and symbolically controlled . . . a perpetual state of disequilibrium between personalising and objectifying. (p. 122)

For Dewey, this tension is reflected in all aesthetic experiences, where there is no distinction between self and object: “The two are so fully integrated that each disappears” (p. 249). Or, as Shusterman (2008a), citing Gadamer (n.d.) notes, “In the
experience of play, the player is also played by what he plays” (p. 88). Shusterman highlights this within the Indian concept of *rasa*, the highest form of aesthetic experience in which, “The subject/object duality is entirely overcome in an experiential oneness that brings true enlightenment” (Shusterman, 2008a, p. 88). Schechner (2003) has made a study of “rasaesthetics,” informed by his interpretation of the Natyasastra, the Sanskrit manual of performance: “Performing rasicly is to offer emotions to partakers in the same way that a chef offers a meal to diners” (p. 342) – in a gestalt sense, the meal becomes something other than the sum of its individual flavours. In analysing O'Neill's process drama, Taylor and Warner (2006) cite Bruner (1964) in describing the artistic process as allowing oneself to be dominated by the object. They summarise: “An artist who is bent on maintaining full control over his or her work is incapable of accepting that a work contains more than he or she consciously puts into it” (p. 64). O'Neill (1995) describes how this integration of self and object in role leads to knowing: “Even the most limited and functional kind of role taking will demand some degree of self-transcendence, something that goes beyond the actual here and now” (p. 80). This self-transcendence in role is driven largely by emotion. Further to this, Dunn, Bundy and Stinson (2015) have begun to explore the complexity of emotion in relation to engagement in participatory drama, with its potential to elicit emotional responses to both the actual and dramatic worlds. Such emotion, the authors argue, is driven by the varying levels of commitment and connection that participants may feel to the dramatic event.

Along side Dewey’s (1934) conception of emotion, there appears to be a general acceptance that a distinction exists between the subjective, sensory experience of emotion and its structured, outward expression. Witkin (1974) differentiates between “gross emotion” and the structured response of feelings; Courtney (1995) distinguishes between emotions, which are immediate responses, and feelings, which are reflexive; and Blair (2006) cites Damasio (2003) in the assertion that, “Emotions play out in the theatre of the body. Feelings play out in the theatre of the mind.” (p. 176). On the other hand, Sarbin (1998b) suggests that emotions are “poetic constructions” (p. 297) and distinguishes between the “bodily states” of emotion, and the “emotional life” that is culturally constructed and narratively situated. Best (1992) distinguishes between “sensations” which are measurable changes in the body, and emotions, which are directed outward towards an object via expression; and similarly Schechner (2003) distinguishes between feelings as being experienced and subjective, whereas emotions are communicated and objective. Hurley (2010) distinguishes between affect – an
immediate uncontrollable subjective response — and emotion, “A bridge between body and mind, between sensation and evaluation, and indeed between individual and group” (p. 20). In this, Hurley draws attention to the contextual, culturally determined quality of emotion that both Hohr (2010) and P.W. Jackson (1998) believe was key to Dewey’s understanding. This contextual aspect of emotional integration is also present for Vygostky and Stanislavsky in their use of the Russian term “perezhivanie”: a dynamic unity of emotion and intellect that is environmentally and socially dependent (see Carnicke, 1998; Gajdamaschko, 2005; van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994). This returns my discussion to the emotional quality of metaxis in drama, which might be seen as more than “dual affect” (see Vygostky as cited in G. M. Bolton, 1984 and O’Toole, 1992) but a kind of emotional complexity: a tension or integration within the participant between the emotions that they choose to represent, the actual emotions that they associate with the image, role or situation being represented, the cultural or contextual implications of these emotions, and the participant’s more reflective affective response to the act of playing.

Within my aesthetic frame, I also acknowledge the work of recent narrative theorists, who suggest that emotion is a key aspect of how we engage with narrative, either in a literary sense (Carroll, 1997), or in Bruner’s (1986, 1990, 1991b) more expansive sense of narrative as way of constructing reality (see also Goldie, 2012). Carroll suggests that emotions direct our attention and interest to particular details of narrative: “The emotions operate like a searchlight, foregrounding those details in a special phenomenological glow” (p. 201). Goldie suggests that the process of emplotment involves not only organising and shaping events, but also “colouring” them with emotion (p. 8). Emotion might therefore act as a searchlight within the actual and artistic frames, informing and colouring the construction of meta-narratives that underpin the context, and the narratives that are created within the drama. In addition to narrative, emotion is seen by many as the searchlight that informs the selection and rejection of material (judgement) in all aspects of the creative process (see Courtney, 1995; P. W. Jackson, 1998; Lutterbie, 2006; Radford, 2004). Johnson (2007) expands this view of emotion beyond judgement: emotions “are key components of complex processes of assessment, evaluation, and transformation” (p. 68). In the creative process therefore, emotion is integral to how we explore what Best (1992) describes as the expressive possibilities of the medium, and we test and navigate the tensions and rhythms within experience. In this, the searchlight not only picks out certain details, but also illuminates the scene with colour and meaning.
Spontaneity

Dewey (1934) suggests that the acceptance of the self-object symbiosis on the part of the artist is dependent upon the interaction between structure and spontaneity:

The very existence of a work of art is evidence that there is no such opposition between the spontaneity of the self and objective order and law. In art, the playful attitude becomes interest in the transformation of material to serve the purpose of developing experience. (p. 291)

To further clarify, “Art is the fusion in one experience of the pressure upon the self of necessary conditions and the spontaneity and novelty of individuality” (p. 281). He suggests that the spontaneous, “unexpected turn” away from structure is what distinguishes art from design (p. 144). According to both Shusterman (2000a, 2009a, 2011a) and Granger (2001, 2010) though, Dewey sees spontaneity as a product of habit, and it is the spontaneous reconfiguring of habit in interaction with new environments or situations that leads to renewal. Nohl (2009) cites Dewey (1986, 1987) in describing the rhythm between habit and innovation via spontaneity: “The spontaneous action mobilizes the potential of this ‘qualitative background’ . . . and ‘starts an experience that does not know where it is going’” (p. 299). As I have described earlier, certain roles can be conceived as habits but so too can certain narrative structures. Bruner (2004) suggests that in life narratives, and by extension autobiography, “The ways of telling and conceptualising experience are so habitual that they finally become recipes for structuring experience itself” (p. 708). Certain branches of narrative theory concern themselves with the tropes that are present and repeated within narrative forms such as mass media, literature and drama. Indeed, some forms of therapeutic drama draw on Jung’s notion of archetypes to connect habitual roles with the narratives of mythology (see Landy, 1992). Habitual roles and narratives might therefore be seen as the qualitative background against which spontaneous action leads to innovation and ultimately renewal. O’Neill (1995) describes this rhythm in relation to role, drawing on Heathcote (1995) and Moreno (1959) in foregrounding spontaneity as crucial to the process of renewal in role:

For Dorothy Heathcote, taking on a role means that there is a need to ‘read’ the situation, to harness relevant information from previous experience, and to realign this information so that new understanding becomes possible. Like Moreno, she believes that the most important aspect of taking on a role is its spontaneity. It is unplanned, unpremeditated and as a result can constantly surprise the individual into new awareness. (pp. 79-80)
A number of theorists conceive improvisation and spontaneity as a process wherein habitual responses and accepted structures are brought to bear on the situation in innovative ways, guided by emotion (see Dewey, 1934; Fesmire, 2003; Granger, 2001, 2010; Johnstone, 1999, 2007; Nohl, 2009; O'Neill, 1995; Sawyer, 2000; Shusterman, 2009a, 2009b, 2011a; Taylor & Warner, 2006). This principle is reflected in process drama, the success of which is dependent upon the interplay between the dramatic structures created by the teacher, and the spontaneity that participants engage in within those structures (Taylor & Warner, 2006). In discussing the nature of improvisation, O'Neill offers, "To the audience, an effective improvised performance will seem written, even when there is no prior text" (pp. 25-26). She suggests that the skill and artistry of Keith Johnstone's (1979) Theatre Machine, was the actors' "grasp of dramatic structure that they brought to the challenge of improvisation" (p. 27). Extending on O'Neill and Johnstone's work, Dunn (2011) proposes a "playwright function" framework to analyse how participants spontaneously structure improvisation in drama. In terms of group-devised theatre, Heddon and Milling (2006) suggest that the spontaneous intuition that guides the artists' selection of an improvised moment for inclusion in a piece is grounded in the structures of "a shared set of patterns and experience" (p. 10). As I have discussed earlier, the "searchlight" of emotion informs and colours this process (Carroll, 1997, p. 201; see also Goldie, 2012). Johnstone (1999) recognises the power of improvisation in freeing the "clamped together" bodies and minds of the players (pp. 337-338). Spontaneity is a key element within therapeutic drama, where dramatic play and improvisation are utilised in accessing the internal feeling states of participants (see Blatner, 2000; Blatner & Blatner, 1997; Emunah, 1994; Landy, 1994; Moreno, 1975). Yet clients are also encouraged to move beyond the emotional release of spontaneity: "[Imagination] is more than mere impulsivity because it requires some intention to achieve an aesthetic or constructive effect" (Blatner & Blatner, 1997, p. 5).

The Art of Living

In this thesis, I have used the art of living as a way of focusing specifically on the embodied, ethical dimension of "making the crossing" between self and world (Greene, 1995, p. 3). It is the intentional pursuit of personal and cultural renewal in applied theatre, through participation, process and knowing. Viewed in isolation, the pragmatic pursuit of personal and cultural renewal through aesthetic experience may threaten to return applied theatre to a solely instrumental, transformative focus as described at the beginning of this chapter. But a pragmatist aesthetic view inspired by Dewey (1934) and
Bruner (see 1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004) is vibrant and holistic – it seeks to unify affect and effect (Thompson, 2009b), rather than siphon the latter off in order to fulfil some version of narrow instrumentalism. Dewey’s aesthetic theory supports the notion that art should “serve life” rather than “prescribing a defined and limited mode of living” (p. 140). In this sense, the nature of personal renewal can be viewed as both highly subjective, but at the same time it is ethically constituted in interaction with others. As I have described previously, in proposing somaesthetics as a discipline for the pursuit of intentional embodied renewal, Shusterman (2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012) draws on Dewey to suggest that ethics in moral philosophy can only be seen as hollow abstractions until they are embodied and enacted. Similarly, Chambliss (1991) suggests, “Dewey’s portrayal of ideas as images-of-things-that-might-be . . . require action to determine whether the ‘might-be’ can be transformed into an ‘is’” (p. 45). Fesmire (2003) suggests that Dewey’s central view of imagination in moral judgement is “the capacity to concretely perceive what is before us in light of what could be” (p. 65). He extends upon this to discuss the ethical implications of jazz improvisation, which he sees as comparable to improvisation in drama (pp. 92-96), suggesting that both forms engage participants in a process of spontaneous interaction that at its best, results in a unified performance embodying ethical collaboration, cultural situation and creative innovation. Similarly, Johnstone (1999) suggests that some of the key measures of quality in an improvisation are that the actors “are taking care of each other and being altered by each other” (p. 340) and that they are not “being negative,” “fighting for control,” or “ignoring moral implications” (p. 340).

Influential scholars in aesthetic education such as Abbs (2003), Best (1992) and Greene (1995) acknowledge the embodied ethical dimension of the arts. Nicholson (2005) highlights the relationship between aesthetics and ethics in narrative, drawing upon the theories of Benjamin (1992) and Ricoeur (1992) to propose that narrative in applied theatre employs both imagination and moral judgement (p. 64). Similarly Bruner (1991b) suggests, “To tell a story is inescapably to take a moral stance, even if it is a moral stance against moral stances” (1990, p. 51). O’Connor and Anderson (2015) assert, “applied theatre is part of a long tradition of theatre that at its heart contains the possibility of active and participatory citizenship” (p. 30). Theatre of the Oppressed is built upon the notion of an embodied social democracy in which participants are engaged as activists, and all aspects of the work – games, images, forum theatre – are centred on the interaction between the personal and the political (see Boal, 1985, 2002, 2006; Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 2006; Diamond, 2007). These ideals of participatory democracy have come to be embodied within many other community-based
performance practices (see Haedicke & Nellhaus, 2001; Kuppers & Robertson, 2007; McAvinchey, 2014; Prendergast & Saxton, 2009). Others have engaged with the idea of drama education as potentially embodying the ideals of moral education, social justice and active citizenship for children and young people (see Chan, 2013; Edmiston, 2000; Freebody & Finneran, 2013; Neelands, 2010; Winston, 1996, 1999, 2006a, 2010; Winston & Strand, 2013). Therapeutic drama often aims to assist participants in harnessing aesthetic experience towards healing and expanding the self in a social context (see Blatner, 2000; Emunah, 1994; Jennings, 1995). Blatner describes this as a move towards “abundant living” or “living more fully” (p. 96). Granger’s (2001) analysis of “dramatic rehearsal” in Dewey’s theory as an element of the poetics and ethics of self-creation is embodied in many applied theatre practices, where the drama space is seen as a testing ground in which to effectively rehearse for life (see Boal; Diamond; Baim et al., 2002).

The theoretical lens that I have described in the previous chapter and developed here embraces the complexity and chaos within experience, and its ugly, messy and unstable narratives. Dewey’s (1934) notion of a rhythm between disturbance and harmony acknowledges disturbance and disharmony as key aspects of aesthetic engagement and renewal. His notion of unity – the pervasive quality that gives experience its aesthetic dimension – is dynamic and unstable. Both Shusterman (2008a) and Granger (2006) acknowledge that Dewey’s version of unity can embrace the “fragmented or discordant” (Shusterman, p. 87). “Experiences involving some degree of pain, loss, or even the conventionally ‘ugly’ can have a palpable aesthetic quality insofar as they heighten our appreciation for the intrinsic meaning and value of those things that make up our everyday lifeworlds” (Granger, 2006, p. 132). Smuts (2007) explores what he calls “the paradox of painful art” in which “people seek out art that arouses painful emotions” (p. 60). Kupfer (1983) suggests, “No matter how depressing the subject matter or theme, we, if appropriately responsive, are not left depressed or sad. The sorrow is incorporated in a form whose integrity carries us beyond the emotion” (p. 84). Indeed, Dewey moves through five chapters of his treatise before addressing the notion of beauty, which he describes as “an obstructive term” that should not be used to describe the aesthetic quality of experience. Dewey suggests, “It is surely better to deal with the experience itself and show whence and how the quality proceeds” (p. 135).

Dewey’s (1934) suggestion that the passage between disturbance and harmony provides us with the moment of “intensest life” (p. 17) gives weight to the idea of tension as pivotal within, not only knowing, as I have described previously, but also in
conceiving an art of living. Barba (2004) addresses the disturbance-harmony rhythm by referring to “the deep order called turbulence” in dramaturgy. Stoller (2013) believes that disharmony and dis/integration are equally important aesthetic categories as harmony and beauty in teaching and learning. “The very structure of human experience . . . is characterised as much, if not more, by failure than success” (p. 25). “Creating meaning and value from deep failure is as much an affective event as it is a cognitive event, and such failure must be overcome through an interrelated process of healing and narrative re/visioning” (p. 29). In his “aesthetics of participation”, G. White (2015) suggests, “There will be moments of beauty, and other typically aesthetic experiences in these processes, but the difficulties and conflicts are important too, often being when the most significant learning or personal change happens” (p. 45). In his keynote address to the Theatre Applications conference in London in 2011, I heard encouraging us to embrace the “perverse beauty” within the aesthetics of applied theatre in order to move it away from a simplistic discourse of truth and goodness. He invoked the aesthetics of Jean Genet in alluding to the “dignity and grace” that can exist in ritualised performances of violence and criminality (cited in Mackey & Stuart Fisher, 2011, p. 380). The art of living therefore does not imply that we strive for perfection and wholeness, but rather that ethical participation and personal and cultural renewal are dependent upon an engagement with every aspect of “human progress in all its splendor and misery” (Gallagher, 2005, p. 93). As I have discussed, this rhythm is strongly reflected in narrative theory in the structural relationship between canonicality and breach (Bruner, 1991b, p. 15). Ricoeur (1984) draws upon Aristotle in describing the “concordant discordance” which acts as the “mediating function” of plot (pp. 65-66). This rhythm is also reflected in another of Bruner’s (1990) narrative features, “The forging of links between the exceptional and the ordinary” (p. 47). Kermode (1981) uses more beguiling terminology to describe what I equate to less obvious disturbances or breaches, referring to the “secrets” that disrupt narrative sequence. He issues a salutary warning for both artists and researchers in suggesting, “A passion for sequence may result in the suppression of the secret” (p. 84).

Speaking about arts education in schools, P. W. Jackson (1994) challenges what he calls the “sentimental” and “exaggerated” claims for why the arts should be taught in schools: the notions that it is “a means for self expression” or offers “different ways of knowing” or develops “cultural literacy.” Instead, he invokes Dewey in suggesting that the arts are “quintessentially educative”: “They open the door to an expansion of meaning and to an enlarged capacity to experience the world. In short they teach us how
to live richer and fuller lives" (p. 195). Seeing the arts as "quintessentially educative" in a prison context might also help to reinforce the position of prison theatre as art form, rather than a set of tools to be placed in the service of other instrumental agendas. Clements (2004) suggests that arts education in prisons might "enable a more liberating and self-directed rehabilitative process” (p. 169). There are certainly strong points of alignment between my conception of an art of living and more recent moves in rehabilitation theory as put forward by Maruna (2001) and Ward and Brown (2004) for example. These theorists view the prisoner's life in a holistic sense, and in Ward and Brown's case, argue for the development of “goods” such as knowledge, mastery, agency, community, happiness, spirituality and creativity (p. 247). These “goods” connect with the humanising agenda that lies at the heart of much prison theatre practice. However, rather than once again aligning to an external theory of rehabilitation, I am compelled to explore this humanising potential from within the form, with Shusterman's theory of somaesthetics (2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012) offering a possible pathway. The practices that Shusterman (2008b) includes in his proposal for the field of somaesthetics include meditation, yoga, Feldenkrais method, martial arts, weightlifting, athletics, dieting, bodybuilding and sex. Initially, he excluded artistic practices from his discussion, but he recently included a brief analysis of Japanese Noh theatre in his corpus (2009a). Some scholars have begun to interrogate Shusterman's notion of somaesthetics in relation to dance (Arnold, 2005; Mullis, 2006a, 2008), theatre (Mullis, 2006a, 2008; Petersen, 2013) and contemporary performance practices (Jay, 2002; Mullis, 2006b). G. White (2015) argues that, due to its focus on individual well being over social change, Shusterman's work does not “map across” to applied theatre entirely (p. 77). I would suggest, however, that Shusterman's embrace of Eastern philosophies such as Buddhism, and the work of Dewey, de Beauvoir, Bourdieu and Foucault certainly signal the social and cultural implications of somaesthetic theory and practice. Yet despite its emphasis on the soma as the medium of expression, Shusterman's theory and the extrapolations mentioned above so far provide little exploration of the subjective nature of somaesthetic engagement, or what it might mean to experience somaesthetic engagement.

O'Neill's (1995) suggestion that drama involves the enactment of “possible selves” (p. 79) and Prendergast's (2011) suggestion that it enables participants to glimpse "performed utopias" has interesting implications for an art of living within the prison environment. Foucault (1986) describes the prison as one of many "heterotopias" that exist in our culture:
Places that do exist and that are formed in the very founding of society - which are something like counter-sites, a kind of effectively enacted utopia in which the real sites, all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted. (p. 24)

Foucault gives the examples of rest homes, psychiatric hospitals, cemeteries, cinemas, theatres, museums, ships, brothels and even formal gardens, suggesting that such places are neither of this world nor another, and that they "always presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates and makes them penetrable" (p. 26). Sarbin (2005) explores the notion of "place identity" as the self that is created in concert with our environment. He suggests that architects and planners should see the places that they construct as "stages for the enactment of human dramas" (p. 203). As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the drama workshop space is frequently seen as a place of safety and community within the harsh environment of the prison. Viewed in relation to Foucault's notion of the heterotopia, one might conceive of the drama workshop as being, paradoxically, a way back towards the real world for participants; a way that is paved by the transitional, liminal experience of ritual and play (Turner, 1982). In Sarbin's terms, the prison as a stage for the enactment of human dramas will invariably influence the kinds of dramas that are created there. The pursuit of personal and cultural renewal through this process must acknowledge the art of living in prison, a "heterotopia" that is often ugly, dis-harmonious, an-aesthetic; and invariably plays host to narratives of perverse and painful beauty, not just those harmonious stories of redemption and transformation.

Conclusion

In this study, I have developed an understanding that aesthetic experience in applied theatre is based on a rhythm between self and world - the art of participation. I have established that role and narrative exist as embodied structural and expressive elements within both the artistic frame of the drama, and the actual frame of our lives, with these often interacting and overlapping with each other as the experience unfolds. Role and narrative, operating in both frames, contribute the self- and world-making in applied theatre: the exploration of "possible selves" (O'Neil, 1995, p. 79) or "performed utopias" (Prendergast, 2011) being an integral part of the imaginative processes operating within the form. I have explored the possibility that roles and narratives that we frequently use in either frame can be equated to Granger's (2001, 2006, 2010) interpretation of Dewey's habits - what he also describes as arts - which we develop in
order to respond effectively to our environment. Following Granger, and Shusterman (2006b, 2008b, 2011a, 2011b, 2012), I have explored the idea of habits as embodied responses to the environment that are located in the soma, and as Shusterman suggests, stagnant, negative or destructive habits can be ameliorated through embodied (or somaesthetic) practices. I have therefore presented applied theatre as a potentially somaesthetic practice along side other art forms such as dance (Arnold, 2005; Mullis, 2006a, 2008), theatre (Mullis, 2006a, 2008; Petersen, 2013) and contemporary performance practices (Jay, 2002; Mullis, 2006b), where the body is itself the instrument for expression. I have described Spontaneity as a key element of the creative process, involving the integration of emotion with judgement, and habit with innovation in an absorbing somatic, and potentially somaesthetic sense, which can lead habit towards renewal (Granger; Shusterman). Renewal has therefore been positioned as an aesthetic term, a rhythmic, horizontal expansion of the self and world (Granger), which I would suggest may occur within a moment, or across an entire epoch, and anywhere in between. Aesthetic engagement has been explored as the quality of attention or perception that occurs in this creative process of self- and world-making – an integration of cognition, emotion and action, spontaneity, surrender and reflection, means and ends and doing and undergoing, that drives the art of process. Emotion both informs and is formed by this engagement. It is the somatic “searchlight” (Carroll, 1997, p. 201) that seeks out the qualitative value within experience, and draws us towards the structural and expressive elements (role and narrative) that give it form. I have described metaxis as the embodied integrative process of the art-life interaction in applied theatre, between fiction and reality, role and self, subject and object, surrender and reflection (see Allern, 2001; Boal, 1995; G. M. Bolton, 1984; Bundy, 2003a; Cahill, 2010; Jackson & Leahy, 2005; Linds, 2006; O’Connor, 2009; O’Neill; O’Toole, 1992; Perry, 2012). I have likened metaxis to Dewey’s (1934) aesthetic emotion, a heightened quality of feeling that arises from our perception of the integration of tensions and rhythms, or qualitative unity within as experience (p. 79). Aesthetic emotion is a quality of feeling that gives meaning to experience and results in new forms of knowing. Following this thread, I have suggested that aesthetic experience and renewal in applied theatre are therefore dependent upon what happens in both the artistic and the actual frames, and how these frames interact with each other: the rhythm between art and life. I have suggested that the intentional pursuit of this rhythm towards different forms of renewal is what makes applied theatre an art of living.
In undertaking this review, I have identified a number of areas in which my study of Living Stories might make a significant contribution to the field of applied theatre more broadly, and specifically prison theatre. To begin with, there exists very little documented research into the use of drama in Australian criminal justice contexts and this study will hopefully assist in increasing the profile of the work in this country. In addition to this, aesthetic experience and engagement within prison theatre has been neglected in the articulation of the field, which appears to have been swept along by the same instrumental, transformative and radical political arguments as the applied theatre field as a whole; at times being colonised by theories that inform psychology, social science and criminology. While these elements of the field have been vital and interesting, I acknowledge that prison theatre might benefit from being explored and articulated in its own aesthetic languages, contributing also to the broader turn back towards aesthetics in applied theatre. My pragmatist experiment here is also to adopt what I see as a compelling theory of aesthetic experience (and experience in general) with which to explore the concept of personal and cultural renewal as an intentional goal within prison theatre. Through this lens, the interaction between the aesthetic and the ethical in prison theatre may hopefully revitalise the field, with Shusterman's (2000b, 2000c, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012) emergent theory of somaesthetics beginning to articulate the intentional use of the body within applied theatre as an art of living. In all of the applied theatre forms, approaches and structures I have discussed in this review, there is a sense of rhythmic movement towards dynamic form that creates new understanding and embodied forms of personal and cultural renewal - whether these are political, therapeutic, educative, or celebratory. I have suggested that the four principles: The art of knowing, the art of participation, the art of process and the art of living underpin applied theatre in all of its forms, and all of its forms exemplify the integration between life and art that lies at the core of aesthetic experience. Applied theatre has the potential to be Dewey's (1934) consummatory experience and Bruner's (1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004) narrative knowing in action. The rhythms that underpin applied theatre – the artistic, the actual, fictional, factual, self, world, disturbance, harmony, surrender, reflection, structure, spontaneity, art, life - exist in an interconnected non-hierarchical relationship in which the constant shifting tensions between these concepts are what create dynamic form. They are not set up as fixed binaries, for if they were the strings of a guitar, the aesthetically engaged musician would concern herself primarily with the joys and sorrows that emerge from picking, not the points at which the strings are attached at either end.
This shimmering space, where imagination and reality intersect – this is where all love and tears and joy exist. And this is the place: this is where we live. (Cave, 2014)
Chapter 3. Method as Experience: The art of knowing

Introduction

Throughout Chapters 1 and 2, I have established an aesthetic frame for my study, considered the literature of applied theatre and prison theatre through this frame, and propelled the argument that applied theatre be seen as an art of living that encompasses participation, process and knowing. As I have mentioned previously, I developed the aesthetic frame for my study after the delivery of Living Stories as a way of understanding and analysing the project, and continued to refine this theory through the analysis of the practice. This has presented significant methodological opportunities and challenges, as I will explore here. Recognising applied theatre as an art of knowing, I have chosen to draw the research and practice methods of my study into this theoretical flow, rather than position them as separate from it. The qualitative research methodologies that have informed my project from the outset are attuned to the holistic, narrative and aesthetic qualities of experience and knowing as described throughout this study. Many strands of applied theatre scholarship now embrace and explore the integration between theory and practice (see Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011; O'Connor & Anderson, 2015; Thompson, 2003), setting it up as another of the key rhythms that inform how we come to know in these complex encounters.

A key methodological concern for my study has been to find a way of integrating the aesthetic with the instrumental, rather than importing models from outside the art form of drama to analyse and describe its transformative or ameliorative potentials. I have therefore used the concept of renewal to guide this process, recognising it as an aesthetic term that describes the rhythmic expansion of self and world through the creative process – the art of living. Through an exploration of renewal, I have aimed to avoid consistently measuring the success of the project against instrumental goals, and rather developed an understanding of its poetry and complexity. I have also explored how the women engaged with the drama, and what role this played in the renewal process. My primary research question is therefore:

*In Living Stories, what was the nature of the women’s engagement, and the potential for movement towards personal and cultural renewal?*

This overarching question, and the notion of different forms of engagement, has led to the following further areas of focus:
- To gain a deeper understanding of the poetics of self- and world-creation and renewal within the process.
- To explore how emotion, spontaneity, narrative and role informed these poetics.
- To explore the key tensions and rhythms that underpinned the experience of Living Stories.

This chapter will describe the epistemological and methodological background to the study, with the reflective methods and drama approaches that I used in the face-to-face context of Living Stories further described and analysed from Chapter 4 onwards. I will begin by considering my pragmatist position as a practitioner-researcher, and discuss the nature of applied theatre and narrative as forms of knowing. I will then go on to describe the data collection, interpretation and analysis for the study, and follow with a discussion about ethics, participation and ownership in terms of the research within the practice.

The Art of Living in Prison: A hopeful proposition

In describing applied theatre as an art of living I have consciously taken a moral stance. I have embraced the notion of applied theatre as an agent for change, and entered into the research process with anything but cool, objective detachment. I agree with O'Connor and Anderson (2015) in their assertion that the times in which we are living demand researchers to be “morally biased” (p. 6), to conduct research that is “grounded in the [critical] hope for change,” (p. 18) and to engage communities in “imagining what the world might be” (p. 19). As I have described previously, one of the aims for my study was to find a rigorous way to describe the processes and outcomes of the work without relying on an alignment with models for change imported from psychology and mainstream offender rehabilitation. My instinct to pursue this line was that the women themselves might have other ways of articulating their hopes and aspirations for change than those that are imposed by the institution, and that an applied theatre process might not only help them to identify these, but also embody them in some way. Similarly, I was conscious of the highly contentious issue of “transformation” in applied theatre, the debate surrounding the potential grandiosity of the term, and the risk of it being co-opted by commissioning agents into an agenda for continued oppression (see Ackroyd, 2007; Balfour, 2009; Neelands, 2004; O'Connor & Anderson, 2015; G. White, 2015). Finally, I wanted to resist producing yet another uncritical narrative about the arts in prison as an instrument for redemption. This is what led me towards the aesthetic
theory that I have used to frame the study, and the notion of renewal as an aesthetic term that might describe the process of self- and world-making and remaking that underpins applied theatre as an art of living.

Following Omasta and Snyder-Young’s (2014) survey of the “gaps and silences” in applied theatre research, it seems I have stayed in the “comfort zone” of qualitative research methods and philosophical inquiry (p. 17). I have, however, engaged with the recent resurgence of interest in the aesthetic in applied theatre (see Haseman & Winston, 2010; G. White, 2015) – specifically aesthetic experience and engagement – and found the exploration of this terrain far from comfortable. I began with a very open, generalised question in mind about whether drama could be a positive activity for women at Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre (BWCC). This question contained within it the idea of positive change, and was informed by theories of rehabilitation and instrumental benefit that came with me from my previous work with Geese Theatre Company (see Baim et al., 2002; Watson, 2009) – notions that impacted on the research process as I will describe below. I also had a strong interest in devising a performance based on personal narratives – one that I had to let go of very quickly as I will explore in the next chapter. From a research perspective, I was informed by Thompson’s (2003) at the time emergent idea of Theatre Action Research (TAR), which has since been further developed into Applied Theatre as Research (ATAR) (see MacNeill, 2015; O’Connor & Anderson, 2015). I was informed by narrative via narrative theory, case study and reflective practice (see G. Bolton, 2001; Bruner, 1986, 1990; Clandinin, 2007; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Schön, 1983; Stake, 2005; Yin, 1994). I possessed a strong desire to empower the women as co-researchers and bring their voices to the fore through the principles of Participatory Action Research (PAR) (see Brydon-Miller, Kral, Maguire, Noffke, & Sabhlok, 2011; Chataway, 2001; Fine et al., 2004; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005; Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2013; O’Connor & Anderson). All of these methods and approaches came to fall within an overarching arts-based methodology that oscillated between practice as research, research as practice, practice-led/based research, research-led/based practice – leading me to hold onto Hughes, Kidd and MacNamara’s (2011) idea of “practised method” as an anchor (see Woodland, 2013). Towards the end of the project, after all the same messiness that Hughes et al. so vividly describe, I reacquainted myself with Dewey’s (1934) theory of experience and aesthetics. Previously, this text had seemed abstract and inaccessible - woolly even. But after going through the experience of Living Stories, I came to see how elegantly Dewey’s theories reflected the life-art rhythm in experience, performance and narrative that lay at the core
of my project. This analytical turn led to the positioning of my project as an exercise in pragmatist aesthetics (see Shusterman, 2000b), and led me towards a consideration of Living Stories as an art of living.

**Applied Theatre as Knowing**

The theoretical terrain that I have covered previously is underpinned by the notion of art as an embodied, intuitive and inherently emotional mode of knowing that is just as rich, authoritative and reflective of human experience as the sciences, with an implicit assumption that neither should be elevated over the other. It also contains within it the rhythmic notion of movement between binaries towards consummation, or qualitative unity. Speaking on dramaturgy, Barba (2004) suggests,

> The tensions between forces that are divergent, opposed to one another or simply contiguous, can lead to catastrophe. But if we succeed in keeping these forces at bay and discovering the kind of relationship that exists between them ... then we will attain density instead of catastrophe. Density disorients the spectators, forcing them to extract the difficult from the difficult and shaking them out of the familiar trains of thought, which constitute a safe home for their ideas. (p. 255)

Barba’s approach reflects the same qualities that Kershaw and Nicholson (2011) allude to in applied theatre and performance research (pp. 1-16). By exploring the rhythms and tensions that existed in my project, I hoped to achieve the same density that Barba describes in constructing a dynamic, challenging and aesthetically satisfying performance. The process of arts-based inquiry might similarly be described as a process of extracting the difficult from the difficult. What I have therefore hoped to achieve through my thesis is a sense of the dynamic form of Living Stories as an experience (Dewey, 1934), embracing disharmony, disunity, messiness and ugliness as much as beauty and elegant design. Of course, this is not an easy undertaking, as Granger (2006) suggests: “The more the meaning of an experience is carried through its immediate qualitative dimension, Dewey argues, the more conspicuous the limits of language become” (p. 93). O’Toole (1992) also acknowledges the limits of language in describing the dynamic and affective processes of drama (p. 7). “‘Loss’, in the context of writing about performance, is associated with the death of the ‘live’ event” (Shaughnessy, 2012, p. xiv). It is the limits of language that have driven forward the arts-based methodologies that are now prevalent in applied theatre research (see Kershaw &
Nicholson) and the notion of applied theatre as both the process and the object of inquiry (see Hughes et al., 2011; O'Connor & Anderson, 2015; Thompson, 2003).

O'Connor and Anderson's (2015) proposal for morally guided research reflects the principles of critical arts-based inquiry as described by Finley (2005, 2011). Finley (2011) draws on Barone (2001), Barone and Eisner (1997), Dewey (1934/1958) and Tolstoy (1946/1996) to assert, “In arts-based research within the paradigm of revolutionary pedagogy, the artfulness to be found in everyday living composes the aesthetic” (p. 443). In this, the work reflects the principles of applied theatre, and presents an argument that applied theatre itself is research. Finley describes a pragmatic approach to research in which “arts are both a mode of inquiry and a methodology for performing social activism” (p. 436). She further states, “Arts-based research makes use of affective experiences, senses, and emotions. Its practitioners explore the bounds of space and place where the human body is a tool for gathering and exploring meaning in experience” (p. 444). My applied theatre practice in Living Stories encompassed experiments with image theatre, therapeutic drama, text-based work, improvisation games, drama skills development and process drama; finally touching on group devised performance. The rationale and depth of these practices will be teased out further in the chapters that follow, but they all possessed the potential for embodied meaning making that Finley and others describe in arts-based research (see also Barone & Eisner, 2012; Jagodzinski & Wallin, 2013; Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011; O'Connor & Anderson; Rolling, 2013).

In his proposal for Theatre Action Research (TAR), Thompson (2003) recognises that many participatory applied theatre processes mirror those of action research, inviting communities or groups to work together in the generation of knowledge and the identification and solving of problems. Such processes have grown simultaneously from the theories advanced by educational reformist Paulo Freire (1972), Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1985), and approaches to action research put forward first by Lewin (1946) and subsequently Greenwood and Levin (1998) and Kemmis and McTaggart (1988, 2005, 2013). Applied theatre shares the inherent features of PAR as outlined by Kemmis and McTaggart (2005): that it is a social process, participatory, practical and collaborative, emancipatory, critical, reflexive and aims to transform both theory and practice (pp. 567-568). O’Connor and Anderson (2015) draw comparisons between applied theatre and PAR, suggesting, “PAR is a means for enabling people to see themselves as actors rather than spectators, as people with agency and control” (p. 21), and that “this is achieved largely through the reframing of the roles of the
researcher and the researched” (p. 22). Thompson takes care to clarify that while his proposal for TAR purposely splits theatre as an intervention from theatre as research, such a division “can not be sustained absolutely” (p. 168). The inability to sustain this division is perhaps what has prompted O’Connor and Anderson to propose Applied Theatre as Research (ATAR). In conceiving ATAR, the authors acknowledge that acts of interpretation, reflection and analysis are as much a part of the theatre-making process as they are of the research process; and that ideas of empowerment and participation infuse them both.

While I am committed to the notion of applied theatre as an art of knowing, and that its position as an art of participation reflects many of the same principles of critical arts-based inquiry, PAR, TAR and ATAR as described above, I must acknowledge that Living Stories presented me with many challenges in terms of participatory research that I will explore in more detail below. In a sense, my work was an example of all of these, and none. In terms of a cyclic process of planning, action, reflection and re-planning where I attempted to integrate the concerns of the research with the concerns of the art through our group reflections and one-to-one interviews, my project could certainly be seen in terms of TAR or even ATAR. But I was never fully attuned to the idea of integration between research and practice, feeling at times like I was inelegantly jumping from one to the other, with both suffering as a result. Furthermore, I was still pursuing certain ideas of more traditional forms of arts evaluation and instrumental benefit, which is evident in many of the questions that I asked throughout the program, for example: “Will anything that you’ve done in the drama workshops be useful to you elsewhere? If so, how/where?” And to staff: “Are you able to talk about specific women and the effects the drama might have had on them?” This certainly would have influenced not only the responses that the women gave, but also their on-going engagement with the research aspect of our process, and their conception of the kind of knowledge that I was pursuing. It was not until the end of my project that I reached the point that O’Connor and Anderson (2015) hope for: “Perhaps we have come far enough in applied theatre that we can finally reject the false binary of aesthetic versus instrumentalism, and recognize that both are totally and completely entwined” (p. 34). As such, I do not believe that my project was a clear example of PAR, TAR or ATAR, even though I attempted to retain the qualities and approaches of those methods. I therefore remain faithful to Hughes et al.’s (2011) notion of practiced method, where “artistry, improvisation and decomposition” were the (messy) order of the day (see Woodland, 2013).
Narrative as Knowing

In the previous chapter, I have acknowledged applied theatre as a “narrative art” (Nicholson, 2005, p. 63) with the notion that through the process, narrative moves between the actual-artistic and fictional-factual frames as an interpretive and expressive structure. Narrative has been recognised as central to the poetics of self- and world-creation both inside and outside the context of the drama workshop. As Sarbin (2005) suggests from an ontological perspective, “we live in a story-shaped world” (p. 206) (at least in the West). I have referred to the “shadowy epistemology” of the story (Bruner, 1990, p. 55), and the “secrets within the sequence” of narrative structure (Kermode, 1981, p. 84); recognising that narrative need not be factual, linear or stable, and that narrative “truth” is an arbitrary idea. Narrative inquiry has been recognised as a vast area of qualitative research that Chase (2011) asserts concerns itself with “what we can learn about anything – history and society as well as lived experience – by maintaining a focus on narrated lives” (p. 421). While the methodology of this study is not positioned strictly within narrative inquiry as described by scholars such as Chase (2005, 2011), Clandinin (2007), Clandinin and Connelly (2000) and Polkinghorne (1988, 1995), it has become key in exploring within my practised method, and articulating its complexity. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) acknowledge Dewey’s (1934) theory of experience as a significant “imaginative touchstone” (p. 50) for their work in narrative inquiry. They view the research site as a rich intersection of stories: the stories of the participants, those of the researchers and the stories of the physical and ideological spaces in which they find themselves (pp. 63-64). I would suggest that the applied theatre encounter could be viewed in exactly the same way. Chase (2011) explains, “Narrative inquiry revolves around an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them” (p. 421), and that for some researchers, narration is viewed as “the practice of constructing meaningful selves, identities, and realities” (p. 422). In this sense, applied theatre can be seen not only as a narrative art, but also a form of narrative inquiry. ATAR as conceived by O’Connor and Anderson (2015) is largely dependent on practitioner researchers being attuned to the narrated lives of participants, and the narratives they choose to represent through the drama process. Narrative therefore became a key analytical tool as I explored the implicit narratives and dramaturgy within the data (see Saldaña, 2009) and as I “wrote into position” (Pelias, 2011; see also Richardson & St. Pierre, 2005). Finally, narrative has become my principal means of reportage.

Case study provides another methodological thread that propels the idea of narrative as knowing. Stake (2005) asserts that case study represents not a methodology,
but a choice of what is to be studied that may be approached using a range of data sources and methodologies (see also Babbie, 2004; Flyvbjerg, 2011; Yin, 1994). Certain scholars have conceived case study as “story telling” (see Aldridge, 2005; Winston, 2006c), which follows on from Yin’s idea of the “descriptive” case study. Where there may appear some concern over the generaliseability of knowledge gained from the study of singular cases, Stake suggests that it is the reader of the case study narrative who draws their own generalisations through the process of negotiated meaning. Winston furthers this idea by suggesting, “Case study researchers seek validity both in the research process and the way they present their findings” (p. 46). Flyvbjerg discusses the intensity and temporality of case study (p. 301), suggesting that it offers a detailed and “nuanced view of reality” (p. 303), and is able to depict, “the complexities and contradictions of real life” (p. 311). Winston recognizes, “The real power of case study to generate new knowledge can be likened to the knowledge generated by the best forms of drama” (p. 44). In this, he suggests that the very nature of case study, like applied forms of drama, is questioning and dialogic with subjective, sometimes ambiguous meanings (pp. 44-47) – or for Stake, “negotiated meanings” (p. 454). In terms of my project, Living Stories could be seen as a case study in prison theatre, as could the individual cases that I present in Chapters 5 through 8. These represent my “choices of what was to be studied” and they are depicted largely through storytelling that hopefully captures the “complexities and contradictions” (Flyvbjerg, p. 311) within our experience. As such, I refer to them as case stories.

Reflective practice is another inherently narrative research method that has informed my project. Building on Dewey’s (1933) initial ideas of reflection, Schön (1983) developed the notion of the “reflective practitioner” within the context of teacher education and research. By extension, reflective practice has since become further explored as an approach within drama education and applied theatre research (see Bundy, 2006a; Morrison, Burton, & O'Toole, 2006; Neelands, 2006; P. Taylor, 1996, 2000). Schön (1983) conceived the reflective practitioner as one who embraces the uncertainty of practice, moves away from the more traditional expert/client relationship and develops a relationship that is based on mutual learning (p. 300). Neelands proposes that reflective practice should be conceived not as a research methodology, but as a “way of life” for drama educators (p. 17), where there is a commitment to lifelong development and a “critically reflective and reflexive mode of praxis, rather than an orthodox or closed set of methods and procedures” (p. 32). Morrison et al. (2006) further recognise drama itself as a reflective tool (p. 140). Where
Winston (2006c) highlights the capacity for case study to open up ideas and raise questions, P. Taylor (1996) similarly applies this idea to reflective practice, drawing attention to the “multiplicity which is at the heart of reflective practitioner design” (p. 36). Like action research, the goal for contemporary reflective practice is not only to develop individual practitioners’ skills, but also to enable them to be critically reflexive in examining their role within the larger systems in which they work (see Finlay & Gough, 2003; Neelands). Reflection is therefore integral to the participatory models of TAR and ATAR, and serves to assist in the democratization of the research process.

While Schön was concerned with reflective practice in the context of professional competence, G. Bolton (1999, 2001, 2006) has since focused on reflective writing as a way for experiences to “develop us socially, psychologically and spiritually” (1999, p. 194; see also Moon, 2006). Bolton (2001) proposes a “creative adventure through the looking glass” (p. 194), using creative reflective narratives without the limiting divide between fact and fiction (p. 145), and where the practitioner and participant may imagine themselves in a range of possible roles (pp. 8-9). Bolton (2006) also describes the writing up of “critical incidents” as a way of understanding the complexity of difficult, challenging or significant moments in professional practice, an approach that has informed my analysis in Chapter 5. My own narrative reflection existed in journals and notes, as well as some written creative reflections that took me “through the looking glass” of the fact-fiction divide (G. Bolton, 2001, p. 194). Reflection was also present throughout the drama process where, as Morrison et al. (2006) suggest, drama offered three different spaces within which participants were able to view single events, experiences, concepts, actions and interactions: the real-life context, the fictional context, and the performance context (p. 140). Within these three spaces, there can arise from the theatrical form a multiplicity of meanings – a “dynamic embodied practice for analysis” (Thompson, 2003, p. 152). These three contextual frames also reflect the interaction between contextual frames that O'Toole (1992) describes in process drama (pp. 48-67). This has informed how I frame the exploration within my thesis – the actual-artistic and the fictional-factual – and how the narratives and roles in the project moved rhythmically between them. Aside from the reflective possibilities of the drama itself, I also encouraged participants to reflect on their own experiences of the process through discussions after individual exercises, at the end of each session, and in a series of group and one-to-one interviews: to have their “knowing-in-action” (Schön, 1983) recognized as integral to the study. All of these
written and spoken narrative reflections were integral to the applied theatre process itself, as well as constituting data that I was able to analyse later.

**Data, Interpretation and Analysis as Knowing**

The previous sections have described the methodological positioning of my project through an understanding of applied theatre and narrative as forms of knowing, which were integral to both the practice and the research. Many scholars in applied theatre research agree that the process of interpretation and analysis is inextricably interwoven with the practice – that it is ongoing (see Hughes et al., 2011; Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011; O'Connor & Anderson, 2015; Thompson, 2003). Yet alongside this continuous, embodied analysis of the process, there was a body of data that I collected and brought into the flow of my interpretation and analysis.

As I have described in the introduction to the thesis, I conducted Living Stories over the course of four months, running one or two workshops per week that were two hours long (23 sessions in total). The number of women participants fluctuated between 5 and 12, and the program culminated in a performance for around 30 staff and peers that was loosely titled *Inspiring Women from History*. I used a voice recorder in many of our sessions, recording some of the process, as well as our reflective discussions at the end of each workshop, the final performance and the post-presentation debrief (Appendix B). In some sessions, I was not allowed to bring the recorder into the centre due to operational issues; and at other times, I forgot to turn it on in the flow of the process. In these cases I have relied more heavily on my own reflections and observations. I also conducted a number of more formal semi-structured group and individual interviews with participants and staff (Appendix C and D). After Session 12, half way through the program, I recorded a first formal reflective group interview, asking for responses and reactions to the drama process so far. After Session 21, I incorporated further interview questions into our more general post-session reflection. A third group interview took place immediately following our performance, and flowed on from the performance debrief. I also recorded one-to-one interviews with some of the women participants. Due to their other commitments in the prison, it was difficult to arrange interviews with all of them, so the selection process was somewhat arbitrary. My first round of one-to-one interviews occurred immediately following Session 16 with three participants whom I have named Emma, Gwen and Mandy. I had an opportunity to conduct a second round of one-to-one interviews with Gwen and Mandy, and I also included Grace and Tina in this round. Due to logistical reasons, I had to conduct this second round with
Gwen and Tina together, which was not ideal. Both rounds of interviews were semi-structured, but where the first was more fixed, in the second round I asked specific questions pertaining to those particular participants (Appendix C). I also conducted two rounds of interviews with three members of staff, the Education Officers Helen and Nancy, and the Intern Psychologist, Nikki (these names have also been changed). I selected these three staff members for interview because they were closely involved with the set up and delivery of the project, and had regular contact with the women participants. Throughout these group and individual interviews, my questions evolved and developed as I grappled with the tension between my initial focus on instrumental aims, and my emerging sense of integration between the instrumental and the aesthetic, via my developing aesthetic frame. Many of my interview questions therefore reflect a left over tendency on my part to elicit the women's responses to the drama in terms of individual learning and personal development, rather than aesthetic engagement. I acknowledge that this focus therefore would have coloured the women's responses, and I was only compelled later to begin following less traditional lines of enquiry.

In addition to these recordings of sessions and interviews, I kept a journal throughout the project (Appendix E), as well as some workshop plans with reflective notes on how particular exercises had run (Appendix F). The journal contained my observations of the process and the participants' responses, as well as my own reflections on my experience of running the program, my struggles with the system of the prison, my hopes, fears, doubts and plans. I returned to the centre six months after the program had finished to conduct and record a fourth group interview about the themes that were emerging from my analysis of the data (Appendix C). At this point, I also wrote some creative portraits about seven participants who spent significant time on the program (Gwen, Mandy, Tina, Grace, Rachel, Aamira and Emma), as well as a creative piece about the environment of BWCC itself (Appendix G). From this point onwards in my thesis, I will identify the data excerpts used with the Session (S x), group interview (GI x), individual participant interview (II x), staff interview (SI x), journal entry (J x), workshop plan reflection (R x) or creative reflection (CR x) from which it was generated, where x is the number of the respective schedule. Aside from these documented data, there existed in my memory a number of interactions, fragments of conversation and moments that certainly found their way into my interpretation and analysis of the experience. This body of data provided a comprehensive qualitative landscape through which to explore the nature of our experience of Living Stories, yet it certainly possessed shortcomings due to the instrumental focus of my questions.
mentioned earlier. With the benefit of hindsight, I would have devoted more time to collecting more meaningful and detailed observations about the creative process from the participants, and encouraged deeper reflections about their engagement in the art form.

While the process threw up a constantly shifting kaleidoscope of meanings and interpretations throughout that remained with and within me, I did commit these data to three stages of systematic coding and analysis: one at the end of the program, a second six months later, and a third as I approached my thesis submission date. At the end of the program, I asked the five remaining women what aspects of the program they thought would be interesting to explore from a research perspective, and these also informed my analysis. A couple of the women were interested in instrumental benefit. Grace, for example, was interested in the idea of self-esteem and Emma was interested in broader psychological benefits to do with improving people’s lives and addressing “behavioural problems” (GI 3). I incorporated some of these research interests into my final one-to-one interviews with Mandy, Gwen, Tina and Grace, and they have also formed part of the exploration in Gwen and Mandy’s stories in Chapters 6 and 8 respectively. But Tina was asleep during our discussion about research interests, and I failed to come back and ask her about this later. In the first stage of analysis, I was driven by the same pervasive instrumental focus that had informed the project from the beginning. I developed pre-set categories around broader concepts such as *personal narrative, role and transformation*, and then saw what other categories might emerge from my first reading. Through this first analysis, I followed the women’s interests in identifying a range of instrumental personal development outcomes such as “self-esteem”, “communication” and “thinking differently”, but also began to notice that the moments and episodes in which these findings were evident were not at all new or interesting, nor were they compelling from an aesthetic perspective: they felt shallow.

My exploration of narrative and role were far more interesting, and in the second stage of coding, I began to notice a series of integrations between various binary notions: fact and fiction, theory and practice, self and role. As I grappled with ideas about how the actual frame interacted with the artistic frame in the roles and narratives of Living Stories, I re-read Dewey and subsequent scholars such as Garrison (1997, 2004), Granger (2001, 2006, 2010) and Shusterman (2000b, 2008b) who have built on his theory. I decided to incorporate this work in establishing an aesthetic frame for the study, and view the project through this frame. This gave integrative meaning to Living Stories as an experience, and led me to pursue its rhythmic qualities and dynamic form.
in the final stage of analysis. In this stage, I used codes such as “aesthetic emotion”, 
“self-role”, “fact-fiction” and “disturbance-harmony” to consciously explore the, “space 
between binaries” (Kershaw & Nicholson, 2011, p. 2), and attempt to articulate the 
rhythmic complexity of the experience. Inspired by Saldaña’s (2009) dramaturgical 
coding method (pp. 102-105), I also undertook a phase of narrative coding and role 
coding in which I explored the range of different narratives and roles, both factual and 
fictional, that were created and performed within Living Stories. With an ever-increasing 
focus on aesthetic rather than instrumental concerns, I also began to focus on aspects 
such as emotion, role and spontaneity in more detail. It was at this point that I spent a 
great deal of time writing my way through these ideas and “into position” (Pelias, 2011), 
influenced by aspects of Shusterman’s somaesthetics (2000b, 2000c, 2008b, 2009a, 
2012) and Granger’s notions of personal and cultural renewal (2001, 2006, 2010), along 
side existing applied theatre theory into my emerging understanding of the experience. 
In this sense, I applied what Fenner (2003) describes as “aesthetic analysis” to the study 
of my data. For him, aesthetic experience is the raw data that philosophical aesthetics 
seeks to explain. Aesthetic analysis is more interpretive, and involves “separating out 
from our aesthetic experiences one specific part” for closer scrutiny (p. 41). As 
Neumann (2005) suggests, this process in itself can be seen as a potentially aesthetic 
experience in Dewey’s terms, with scholarly learning itself providing “moments of 
beauty and deep engrossment” (p. 68). Throughout this analytical process, I continued 
to focus on the research areas that the women had identified, and was struck by some of 
the terms that they themselves used such as the *bound-up prison person* (as introduced in 
Chapter 4). I incorporated these ideas into my framing of the work, hoping that this 
might help to bring to the study at least some of what Fine et al. (2004) refer to as 
“inmate authority” (p. 119).

It is hopefully clear therefore that my interpretation and analysis of the work in 
Living Stories was an ongoing, evolving process. In Dewey’s (1934) terms this reflected 
the integrative rhythm between doing and undergoing in experience. Similarly, this 
process was a narrative one, whereby my reflective narratives, and the ways in which we 
narrated our experiences during and after sessions all gave evolving structure to the 
experience – structure that was often unstable and unruly. As such, the thesis reflects 
this emergent and evolving articulation of knowing, and is therefore not divided neatly 
into sections that can be called “analysis”, “findings”, “discussion” and “conclusions”. 
The limits of language continued to affect me (and affect me now) as I attempted to 
articulate this dynamic process, and as scholars such as Pelias (2011) and Richardson
and St Pierre (2005) have explored, the writing process itself became (is) a form of analysis that never really ended (ends). The overarching exploration of Living Stories as an experience in Chapter 4, and the four individual case stories that follow, are examples of this form of writing as analysis. I felt it was necessary to submit the project as a whole to aesthetic analysis through the lens that I have articulated in Chapter 1, and to effectively consider the theory along side the practice. In doing so, I developed a more global view of the project, and an understanding of its potentials in terms of engagement and the poetics of renewal. The critical incident of Session 2 (Chapter 5) provided a significant and rich experience of tension and even failure, within which I was able to analyse examples of limited engagement and renewal being thwarted by my choices as a practitioner, particularly centred on the participant Lola. Feeling intimidated by the vastness of experience and engagement as the focus for my study, I felt that the most fruitful way to explore these would be through honing in on individual participants and their trajectory through the program. I chose Gwen, Tina and Mandy because their characters and stories were of particular interest to me, and the data relating to their experiences seemed somehow more rich and complex than they were for other participants.

Participation, Ownership and Ethics

"Are we being researched as people, or people in a prison?" (Mandy, GI 3) Mandy asked this question at the end of the project, when we were reflecting on the whole process and I had drawn the group's attention back to the idea of the research. Her question did not appear to be loaded with any particular agenda – it seemed a genuine inquiry that would help her to understand how the research was to be positioned. My answer to her, against any principles of emancipation or empowerment, was that the research was defined by its location inside the prison. These women were not being empowered to develop knowledge in the aesthetic field of applied theatre regardless of their position as prisoners, but instead to contribute to an understanding of how their role as prisoners interacted with their role as artists, and how drama operated within this very specific environment. If only I had the presence of mind to explore this very tension with the women there and then and discover their feelings about it. But in the heat of the moment, it was difficult for me to see with clarity the ways in which the research process might empower the participants and be made more transparent or inclusive. As is becoming evident throughout this chapter already, I faced significant challenges in maintaining a participatory ethos within my project, which was limited
(like many prison theatre projects) by constraints of time, access, bureaucracy, surveillance and the fixed power relationships that drive the culture of the institution.

While my project possessed certain qualities of TAR and ATAR, it was essentially research on an applied theatre project, and therefore did not wholly integrate the theatre and the research. However, I did hope that my project, like TAR and ATAR, might reflect participatory action research as an “attitude” rather than a methodology (Chataway, 2001, p. 239): “A commitment to a way of being with people, to be responsive to their needs and concerns” (p. 239; see also Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005, p. 458). In TAR and ATAR the key method of inquiry – theatre – is fixed, and therefore does not imply an entirely democratic research process. Thompson (2003) points out that it may be inappropriate or indeed unethical to search for “problems” within community groups where they may not exist, or where the unearthing of such issues may create more problems. Prentki (2009) raises similar concerns about the notion of “interventions” that are unsolicited and imposed from outside, or “above” – and these concerns have particular potency within a correctional environment. Ghaye et al. (2008) propose a turn away from what they see as being a preoccupation with fixing things within action research, towards developing “appreciative insight”, or a more strengths-based approach. However, the context of corrections represents an environment where participants are by default assumed to have problems and where rehabilitative interventions form a staple of the day-to-day prison diet (at least in the West). As such, it was impossible to hold entirely democratic ideals, yet I did attempt to move the group towards a democratic co-creation of knowledge within the constraints of an essentially interventionist paradigm. As Fine et al. (2004) discovered in their prison-based participatory action research project, there was potential to create “a small delicate space of trust [and] reciprocity... A space for critical inquiry” (p. 109). I too sought to create this kind of space, and not to “problematise” the experiences of the group, but rather to “sustain strengths-based discourses” (Ghaye et al., 2008, p. 361) – an approach that supports some of the emerging theory in the treatment of women in corrections as described in the background to my study (see Howells et al., 2004; Sorbello et al., 2002). Yet at the same time, I hoped to avoid the “danger” that Wilkinson and Kitzinger (2009) suggest may arise from this focus on strengths and survival, one that “lies in romanticizing Others and in using our representation of them to delineate ‘our’ vision of the Good Life” (p. 88). In this sense, I was very conscious throughout that the women would articulate their own versions of the “Good Life” (see Chapter 4), and that
my analysis of renewal would be informed by criteria that were at least in part set by the women themselves.

While Fine et al.'s (2004) project sought to discover the impact of college programs on women inmates the authors encountered many of the same contradictions and challenges that are described in the prison theatre literature. There existed a form of self-censorship, where inmate researchers were forced to ask the question, "Is it safe to say this?" (p. 111). This was also reflected in the responses of some of the women at BWCC, who approached the voice recorder with extreme caution, comparing it to the recording of police interviews and the general culture of surveillance in the centre (see S 2; R 1). When I first spoke about the voice recorder, one participant jokingly called me an undercover cop (R 1), and at another point, I remember one of the women turning to the recorder and saying, "No comment," laughing with the group. For Fine et al., there was a disparity between the controlling power of the institution and the active, responsible roles that inmate researchers were encouraged to play within the participatory research process (p. 113). Again, this was reflected in Living Stories where the women often remarked that they were being encouraged to express themselves freely in both performance and discussion in ways that were not usual within the context of BWCC (see examples of this in Chapter 4). Yet the Fine et al. study appears to have achieved a representation of inmates’ voices that is extremely rare within the prison theatre literature – what the team describe as “insider knowledge” or “inmate authority” (p. 119) as mentioned previously. With this insider knowledge, there was potential to move beyond what the authors describe as the “Hallmark card of praise for the program collecting discourses of redemption, transformation and positive effect, unchallenged and underscrutinized” that may characterize research done by “outsiders” (p. 118). As I have discussed in my review of current prison theatre literature, there seems to be a predominance of either this “Hallmark card” representation of the work, or what I call “rage against the machine” – where the radical ideals of the practitioner are brought to the fore against the backdrop of the oppressive prison environment. Either way, it is the “outsider” voice that currently seems to be the loudest, and despite my wish to the contrary, I lacked the time, sophistication and experience as a researcher to bring the participants’ voices to the fore in the ways that I had hoped.

Despite the challenges, I did make several attempts throughout the project to encourage collaboration with the participants in the research process. An interesting moment occurred in the debrief after the final presentation when Emma said, “Can I ask you some questions?” reversing the roles and moving us ever so slightly towards a
more participatory research process. Her first question was, “How do you feel we went?” which was a fair question given I had been leading and observing the group over the past 23 sessions. She then went on to ask similar questions to those I had asked the group: “What kept you from throwing in the towel?” and, “Do you, being a teacher, feel that any of us have... Grown any qualities or gained any insights or do you feel that you see any differences in us?” In response, I highlighted the strengths and positive qualities that I had seen the women demonstrate and develop over the course of the program. It became very much like other ritual closure processes that I have been involved in, where the focus is on congratulating and praising the group, rather than giving an objective response to Emma as “researcher”. Emma followed this by playfully asking, “Do you have any other thoughts you’d like to add?” as the others laughed. She then went on to say, “I’m just trying to give her a different perspective to add to her PhD” (GI 3).

My project was undertaken with ethical clearance from Griffith University’s Research Ethics Committee. Gaining entry into BWCC also required that I submit a proposal to the Queensland Corrective Services (QCS) Research Committee. When I began putting together the proposal, my own instincts, and the advice given to me by two separate correctional psychologists and my secondary academic supervisor, was to align my drama program with current rehabilitation theory and/or the rehabilitation agenda of QCS. In an initial consultation meeting to set up the project, BWCC staff also coached me in how to frame my proposal, offering me some key buzzwords that were being used by the then new Deputy General of corrections, including: “Meaningful Activity for personal enrichment and development.” This approach was further reinforced by the QCS research guidelines (Queensland Corrective Services, 2010), which required me to describe the “proposed value” of my study, or how it might be of direct benefit to the department or the centre in which I would be working. While this very pragmatic approach to mounting such projects is in part supported in the prison theatre literature by scholars such as Davey, Day and Balfour (2014) Balfour and Poole (1998), Hughes (2005) and Tofteland (2011), there also has emerged some critique of using this approach to gain and retain access to the correctional environment (Goddard, 2013; Heritage, 1998, 2004a; Hughes, 1998, 2005; Hughes & Ruding, 2009; McAvinche, 2011; McKean, 2006; Peaker, 1998; Thompson, 1998). The measurement of success posed yet more dilemmas in framing my proposal, given the QCS emphasis on more positivist experimental research designs that are traditionally found in criminology, and my perceived need to “prove” something through the study. McKean
(2006) suggests that in both the content and delivery of projects, as well as the measuring of their success, artists are often under pressure to bow to institutional demands (p. 314). In the end, my research proposals were made successful by positioning my program within the context of mainstream offender rehabilitation and framing it within concepts of psychological well being and personal development – neither of which ultimately informed my study beyond the first stage of analysis.

Working within a correctional environment required a number of confidentiality and security precautions to be built into the research design. Firstly, I was required not to identify or name any participants within the final reportage of my findings. While this was a requirement of the Griffith University Ethics Committee for human studies, it was particularly reinforced through the QCS Research Committee guidelines, where identification of participants may result in heightened security and confidentiality risks (Queensland Corrective Services, 2010). This again has significant implications for participatory research, where participants may ideally be listed as co-authors (see Fine et al., 2004); and for an applied theatre process where participants are ideally credited for their creative work. Participants’ responses within the drama and research processes were also to remain confidential within the group, however, I was required by law to alert centre staff if anyone disclosed details of an offence for which they have not been apprehended, tried or convicted. Due to the potential for participants within these contexts to have vulnerabilities in terms of violence, mental ill health, self-harm and drug and alcohol use, I also built in a second layer to this confidentiality agreement to my informed consent package for the participants (Appendix A): that I may pass on information to centre staff if there was any disclosure describing potential harm to self or others. The potential vulnerability of the participants presented the research with another layer of complexity in terms of ownership, voice and sensitive research approaches that is well-established within applied theatre, but has only recently addressed in detail in regards to qualitative research more broadly (see Liamputtong, 2007). QCS also required that I complete a security induction into BWCC whereby I had to learn appropriate security protocols and other guidelines such as “appropriate touching”. This brought about a number of other tensions and concerns that I describe in detail in Chapter 4.

Further tensions and opportunities in terms of ethics, participation and ownership presented themselves to me once the project was underway. Once I had built a significant amount of rapport with staff in Education and Psychology, I found that they would often vent their frustrations to me about their working conditions within
QCS. Perhaps my status as an outsider made this easier for people, yet they seemed to forget that I was there to do research (see J 23; CR 1). Some staff members also disclosed details to me about the women in our group – their offences, histories and behaviours; and at times I was asked to report on how the women had responded during the workshops, which meant that I was being given a certain amount of power as part of the system that would judge their progress (see J 1; J 11). This challenged my own ethics as both practitioner and researcher, causing me to resolve only to report serious incidents of risk or safety breach (for example the series of incidents described in Chapter 5). Otherwise, I tried to maintain a focus on positive behaviours and outcomes when I reported to staff about the women (J 1).

The women seemed very much aware of the two-way transaction that was occurring between us in terms of the research, and approached it somewhat cynically at times. When I was discussing with the group the different personal outcomes that we might achieve through the project, Emma observed that I would be getting a PhD out of it (S 3). Reflecting on Session 14, Cassie was interested in the research, asking me, “So when you finish this, what are you going to do – a thesis or something like that?” She then went on to enquire as to what work I would do after the PhD was finished (S 14). During our discussion about the process that led to our final performance, Emma wryly noted, “She needed to have an outcome because she has to finish her thesis.” Gwen then said, “Are we cynical or are we cynical?” (GI 3) On a couple of occasions, when I asked questions such as, “What do you think of the drama program so far?” the responses seemed pat, even bored, and seemed to come from an implicit awareness that I was looking for positive feedback and instrumental outcomes (S 5). The fact that I was conducting the research as well as the practice meant that I was grounded in the group, there was a sense of trust and openness, and the reflective element of the research was a collaborative effort. But it also potentially meant that the women would censor themselves in terms of their less favourable reactions, or give me answers they thought I would want to hear. I wonder now how things might have been different if an outside researcher had worked on the project. Perhaps my position allowed the women to be more honest in terms of their experiences of the prison system and their personal lives, but less so in terms of giving genuine feedback on the drama program.
Conclusion

In this thesis, I aim to reflect the integrative, rhythmic, embodied, shadowy, secretive, turbulent, factually indifferent and beautiful nature of experience when it is momentarily captured within the limits of language and other expressive structures such as performance, role and narrative. My methodology reflects the messiness and emergent nature of practised method (Hughes et al. 2011), and also my emerging understanding of arts-based and participatory research. It also reflects my movement away from ideas of instrumental benefit and evaluation, and towards a more integrative, aesthetic view of the practice. In this sense, I have come around to Shusterman’s (2000b) assertion,

To view art’s value as merely instrumental to some other end, be it cognition, morality, psychic balance, or cultural stature, is to re-enact the same castrating logic which first disenfranchised art and subjected it to other cultural practices like philosophy. (p. 46)

This might also be the same castrating logic that has traditionally separated arts practice from arts research. For applied theatre to be conceived as an art of knowing and indeed an art of living, this operation must not be allowed to occur. While I attempted to facilitate Living Stories as a participatory, responsive and ethical applied theatre process, the research element of it has predominantly been my own, informed largely by my observations and interpretations, shaped by my narrative structure that describes my analysis and conclusions. This is what has compromised my project in terms of the art of participation, where my outsider voice has largely prevailed. My next challenge will be to adopt the same “ethics of representation” (Prentki & Preston, 2009) in the research aspects of my work as I have hoped to do in my practice.
Chapter 4. Living Stories as Experience

Introduction

This chapter represents an analytical overview of Living Stories using the aesthetic framework that I have established and broadened in Chapters 1 and 2. The purpose of this chapter is to develop an overall understanding of the context and the project in terms of the nature of engagement and the potential for renewal. As I have discussed in previous chapters, my aesthetic frame for the study acknowledges the aesthetic as potentially existing in both art-centred and ordinary experiences, and that these frames—the artistic and the actual—intersect in unique ways within applied theatre. I have outlined four key principles that form my view of aesthetic experience in applied theatre: the art of knowing, the art of participation, the art of process and the art of living; but rather than artificially fence these principles off from one another as I have done in the previous chapters, I will now develop a research narrative about the project that hopefully interacts with them in a more holistic sense, before moving on to a deeper exploration and analysis through the four individual case stories that follow in Chapters 5-8. In the first section I will explore the ways in which I saw the context of Brisbane Women’s Correctional Centre (BWCC) and the drama program being storied in the actual frame, focusing particularly on the notion of habitual narratives and roles that form the basis for aesthetic experience, engagement and ultimately renewal. I will then discuss some of the ways in which the women storied renewal, and the tensions between their versions of renewal, and the institutional notion of rehabilitation. Following on from this, I will give an overview of how I saw personal narrative operating in this context, through the explicit personal narrative-focused exercises that I introduced in the early sessions. In the second part of the chapter, I will continue to analyse the practices that I undertook in Living Stories and how the women engaged with elements such as improvisation, spontaneity, narrative and role. Through this section, I will discuss the interaction between the artistic and the actual frames, between fictional and non-fictional narratives, and between self and role. I will offer specific examples that hopefully illustrate these aspects of the program in a broader sense, setting the stage for the deeper analysis that follows.

Storying the Context

The aesthetic frame for this study emphasises participants’ interactions with the environment in the self-world rhythm: the art of participation. As I have suggested
previously, a consideration of aesthetic experience in prison theatre must acknowledge the prison as a particularly potent “stage for the enactment of human dramas” (Sarbin, 2005, p. 203): a “heterotopia” (Foucault, 1986) in which self- and world-making is undertaken under highly regulated, often anaesthetic conditions. The place is more than just a difficult backdrop for the participants’ aesthetic experiences that occur inside it – it is an integral part of them. The same could be said of any other environment, but I would argue that in a prison, the interaction becomes infused with a unique form of intensity and meaning. How people habitually respond to the environment affects how they respond within the drama space, and the performances that take place in the new context of the drama space are then tested against the culture of the institutional environment outside. While we did not undertake to represent the environment of the prison directly through the drama, as a group we nevertheless made and re-made this world through our experiences and our narration of those experiences. Through the theory that informs this study, these narratives were integral to the construction of meaning in this space, and how we came to know the environment of BWCC, its culture and its relationships.

In previous chapters I have explored the idea that narrative and role might be conceived as embodied, structural modes of human behaviour and expression that are, in many cases, habitual (see Baim et al., 2002; Blatner, 2000; Bruner, 2004; Goffman, 1969; Granger, 2001, 2006, 2010; Landy, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994; Moreno, 1975; Sarbin, 1986, 1990, 1998a, 1998b, 2005; Shusterman, 2000a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011a, 2011b, 2012). Drawing on Shusterman’s theory, I have proposed applied theatre as a somaesthetic practice that engages directly and indirectly with the habitual narratives and roles of participants, in both the artistic and actual frames, with the potential to shift these towards different forms of personal and cultural renewal. Renewal is seen as an aesthetic term, derived from the poetics of self- and world-creation (see Granger; Sarbin; Shusterman) that occur in aesthetic experiences that are both art-centred and ordinary, with the intentional pursuit of this goal being what I have described as the art of living. One therefore cannot conceive of renewal as occurring (in life, or in art) without the habits of narrative and role being reconfigured through spontaneity and innovation.

**An adversarial narrative**

After 14 years of working in prisons both in Australia and in the UK, I have found that there appear to be certain narratives and roles that prisoners, staff and arts practitioners
habitually turn to in storying their experience. In a departmental training session for new volunteers and staff that I undertook in my second week at BWCC, the trainer drew a line down the middle of the white board. He wrote “Us” on one side of the line and “Them” on the other. He then proceeded to explain why we could not cross this line (J 3). This kind of adversarial relationship is no surprise given the context, yet I found it interesting that it was being described in the training so blatantly. Later in the program, the Education Officer Helen named the same “us and them” dynamic, suggesting that it was a common and destructive culture within the centre, which the women adopted and perpetuated out of a need for acceptance by their peers (Helen, SI 2). This dynamic appeared to be replicated among the different departments within the institution as well.

The classrooms where the drama program took place were housed in the education block, along with the chapel and the offices where Psychology and Education staff worked. Judging by my conversations with staff here, it seemed that there was a territorial demarcation between this hub of humanity, and the more security-focused machinery that surrounded it.

When I brought the topic of an “us and them” narrative to the women in our follow-up session after the program had finished, they warmed to the subject. Mandy said, “That’s just the way it is,” and Gwen suggested, “It’s not just a matter of them stopping us from walking out the door. It’s a matter of them keeping us down while we’re in here”. In this conversation, Mandy went on to suggest that rather than becoming more compliant, she had simply learned how to “play the game” more effectively. Gwen and Rachel continued enthusiastically with the thread of jail being like a game that they could never win, in which the goal posts were always shifted (GI 4).

The metaphor of prison as a game appeared to be a compelling one, with Lola describing early on the nature of surveillance in similar terms: “Everything in the jail is recorded - we live Big Brother. We are the original reality TV show” (S 2). Helen contradicted this idea in our interview, suggesting that the women were not always under surveillance (SI 1), and Lola herself alluded to the possibility that drug related psychosis might induce a certain level of paranoia (S 2). But regardless of whether it had any foundation in reality, this description speaks to a perception of being controlled and manipulated by omnipotent forces in what Diane described as an “artificial environment” (S 2). Indeed, described my own struggles running the program as having to work my way through a “complex computer game” (CR 1). By its very nature and spatial structure, jail sets up adversarial relationships that are well documented in prison theatre and social theory (see Foucault, 1991; McAvinchey, 2011; Thompson, 2004).
Following Sarbin (2005), the environment is key to the kinds of self-narratives and world-narratives that are created there. Easteal (2001) describes the game that women play being compliant with officers in order to do “easy time” (p. 95). The adversarial narrative presented here by no means represents a comprehensive narrative analysis of the environment, but it is presented as an inescapable and integral aspect of aesthetic experience within this context.

“Bound-up” prison roles

The ways of storying the environment described above have particular implications for the roles that people will play as actors in this narrative, and vice versa. It was Gwen who brought a particularly vivid image to my study of the way in which prisoners respond to their environment. She was discussing how the drama brought something different out in the participants, other than what she called, “the bound-up prison person” (Gwen, II 1). When I asked her to clarify what this “bound-up prison person” was, she described someone being careful what they say and careful what they do, whereas in the drama workshop, she suggested, people could relax (II 1). Gwen’s description of this role is explored in more detail in Chapter 6, but I was extremely taken with this somatic image of binding and have therefore used it to explore how certain bound-up roles existed within the adversarial structures and narratives within the jail. As I have mentioned previously, Geese Theatre Company sometimes conceive this kind of role in terms of the “brick wall” mask (Baim et al., 2002, pp. 184-185; Watson, 2009, p. 53). Indeed the participant Emma described the behaviour as “brick walling and guarded” (II 1). Easteal (2001) suggests that the “don’t talk, don’t trust, don’t feel” culture may not be limited to life inside the prison walls, and may have been formed much earlier in homes affected by abuse, neglect and/or addiction. Other participants also echoed this in their responses to the drama. Fiona described the fear she felt playing improvisation games in the first session, “You’re so used to boxing everything here”, with Diane adding, “And in life too because most of us are drug addicts and we hide behind that” (S 2). When I brought up this role for discussion after the program had finished, Rachel said it was a case of being “reserved” where things go “in one ear and out the other” and Mandy followed by saying, “running on bare minimum” (GI 4). These images of brick walls, boxes, binding and bare minimum have strong somatic connotations. Following Shusterman (2000b, 2002, 2006b, 2008b, 2009a, 2011a, 2011b), who variously cites the influences of Dewey, Wittgenstein, de Beauvoir, Bourdieu and Foucault, I would suggest that the routines and mechanistic repetition of the industrial setting and its adversarial culture and narratives contribute to this bound-up role. It is a
space filled with “docile bodies” (Foucault, 1991) within which the narratives of conflict and oppression are configured into various forms of somatic binding. I would suggest that different prisoners will demonstrate different forms of binding depending on their own particular life circumstances, habits and survival strategies – a concept that I will explore in more detail in the chapters that follow. Somatic binding characterises these roles, but they are also bound up in the narratives that perpetuate them. The term therefore became critical for me in how I conceived renewal for the participants in this context. I saw renewal as inextricably tied to a sense of unbinding, this being an embodied process that informed the poetics of self-creation.

Drama as breach

As the Corrections trainer dug more deeply into what it would mean to maintain the boundary between “us” and “them”, it became obvious that a drama workshop would potentially breach this boundary. In particular, the trainer declared that there be no physical contact during education classes. In response to my challenge to this, he acknowledged that drama was something different, and that I would have to use my own discretion. One of the others in the training session, a newly recruited officer, laughed about how they had come running down the hall after they heard screaming coming from our classroom. This shone an amusing light on just how much of a breach drama was to the norms of the institution; and how it potentially might cross that fateful line (J 3). Within the first two sessions some of the women themselves seemed keen to describe how drama was already becoming a breach of these norms. Lola suggested that they would ordinarily be disciplined if they carried on outside the drama space the way they were doing in the workshop (S 2; R 4). Similarly, Lola, Gwen and Karen observed after the first session that drama was different because they were invited to give their opinions rather than being told to “shut up” (S 2). Another significant part of this breach was the notion that drama offered an opportunity for spontaneity, whereas the jail was characterised by routine, structure and repetition. Diane described this repetition as “groundhog day” (S 4), with the others agreeing with her that the drama workshop represented an opportunity to break the routine and use their minds in different ways (S 4; GI 1). These ways in which the women storied the difference between the drama program and the rest of the jail could have been a function of the adversarial narrative and their roles within it. Setting the drama workshop as something apart, even subversive, may have fitted the narrative well; and the relative freedom that they perceived in the workshop may also have affected how they responded to this new environment.
As I have discussed in Chapter 2, it is precisely this kind of breach of the canonical script that provides the necessary tension to propel a narrative forward (see Bruner, 1991b; Ricoeur, 1984; Turner, 1981); and the prison theatre literature is populated by many such narratives in which this particular tension is described (see Balfour, 2004; Kershaw, 2004; McAvinchy, 2011; Shailor, 2011). Another common thread within this narrative is the drama workshop space as a place of sanctuary within the punitive machinery that surrounds it (see Clare, 1998; Kershaw; O'Connor & Mullen, 2011; Shailor; Stamp, 1998; Trounstine, 2011; J. White, 1998). The women in Living Stories themselves described this in various ways: “You walk in the door for drama and if you have a problem or something, it stays out there. It’s brilliant” (Gwen, S 15); “For a few minutes it makes you feel like you’re not even in here” (Grace, GI 4); “You don’t think you’re in the prison. You just feel that you’re outside” (Aamira, S 4); “It is like offering them freedom, it’s like offering them a door that perhaps they wouldn’t normally have” (Helen, SI 1). I also described the “relative sanctuary” of the workshop room that existed in contrast to the security challenges I faced outside (CR 1). As Kershaw (2004) suggests, the spaces for freedom that exist within a controlled environment such as a prison “are inherently dramatic, paradoxically because they cannot be perceived without the oppressive systems . . . which seek always to eliminate them” (p. 35). In prison theatre, the many stories of transformation that are told from this place of “sanctuary” are made all the more powerful by their articulation against the backdrop of the institutionalisation, even cruelty of the environment and the participants’ life histories (see Shailor, 2011). Yet despite what I see as being another habitual way of storying the context that is indeed compelling in a narrative sense, it sets up a kind of binary relationship between inside and outside the drama workshop space; and between the participants’ difficult histories and their positive participation in the drama. As the chapters that follow will demonstrate, the sanctuary of the drama workshop space is collectively made by the group, but its making can be troubling, and the safety created fragile.

**Storying Renewal**

As I have discussed in Chapter 3, renewal is a term that I have adopted since completing the practice phase of the study, and I therefore did not introduce it in the exercises that I ran, or the reflective conversations that I had with participants at the time. I have therefore used it as an interpretive tool to explore the program’s potentials after the fact, conceiving it as at once highly personal and culturally dependent. In the culture of a prison, it takes on its own meanings that are specific to the context.
Institutional renewal

The rehabilitative rhetoric in BWCC, like many prisons, focuses on re-making the women into successful law-abiding members of society who will not reoffend (see Queensland Corrective Services, 2008a, 2008b, 2013); and the criminogenic rehabilitation programs they offer such as Making Choices (Heseltine, Day, & Sarre 2011; Queensland Corrective Services, 2009a), Turning Point (Queensland Corrective Services, 2009b; Heseltine, Day, & Sarre) and Transitions (Queensland Corrective Services, 2009c) have this as their underlying focus. This could be seen as the institutional ideal of renewal. Yet almost without exception, the women whom I met in Living Stories regarded the institutional rehabilitation programs offered at BWCC with contempt, some adopting a cynical attitude in which they would treat them as part of the game I have described earlier, using them to present a redeemed version of the self to the authorities. In our second interview, Gwen was clear in her dismissal of such programs: “Rehabilitation,” she said, “means sit here, fill out this paperwork, listen to me and nod a lot, you know? And then you’re on your own” (Gwen, II 2). At different times, Karen, Lola and Mandy all described the “textbook learning” that was delivered by young, untrained and inexperienced facilitators who, as Lola opined, “can’t tie their shoelaces up” (Lola, S 2; Mandy, II 2). When I asked Mandy directly about the notion of rehabilitation in our one-to-one interview, she replied, “Yeah, that’s their word, but don’t ask us to spell it” (Mandy, II 2). Mandy was adamant that breaking the cycle within her own life was an individual pursuit, not one that could be taught to her through criminogenic programs (II 2). Similarly, Grace did not equate the jail’s form of rehabilitation as being helpful in changing individuals’ paths. Like Mandy, she seemed to see rehabilitation as being in her own hands, particularly through the process of having time, “to sit and think about like what I want in life” (Grace, II 2). Tina saw participation in criminogenic programs as a serious threat to her sense of security: “People are that bloody selfish and shit that they do go and blab your personal business and that. So I won’t go to them groups mate, I won’t tell ‘em nothin’ about myself” (Tina, II 2; see also J 17). These responses could certainly have been an extension of the adversarial narratives and bound-up roles that I have described earlier, where it would be unthinkable to acknowledge that programs offered by the oppressive powers of the system could be of any use. Yet again it seems unimportant, because for these women, at this point in their lives, institutional rehabilitation was unlikely to register highly in their own sense of personal renewal.
A "good" life

I have explored that within the aesthetic frame that I have established, and the ideal of renewal, there is an understanding of the messy art of living, wherein a good life, like good art, embraces qualities such as disturbance, disharmony and suffering as much as it does harmony and beauty. Regardless of these tensions, the "cultivation of one's garden" (Dewey, 1929, as cited in Granger, 2006, p. 203) is an ethical project. Although I had not established this frame at the start of my project, I already had an interest in how the women themselves might attribute value to their lives, with a small nod to the "Good Lives" model of offender rehabilitation developed by Ward and colleagues (2002, 2004, 2003), and the narratives of "making good" put forward by Marona (2001) in his proposal for meaningfully addressing desistence from crime. As a way of getting to know the group and exploring their interests and views in the first session, I therefore asked the women in small groups to create tableaux entitled "Life is Good". I explicitly stated that the image could be of anything at all – based in fact or fantasy – the definition of "good" being entirely up to the group. I was curious about how the women would depict a good life when there was scope to include anything at all, yet I also understood that such an exercise may only yield fairly superficial results. For participants like Lola, Tracy and Karen, I was prepared that a good life may, in fact, involve excessive drug use and criminal behaviour. The women took to the exercise with both playfulness and careful consideration, creating three images: A mother hosing, a father mowing and two kids playing with a ball; a group of people out in a park – one playing guitar, one reading, one sunbathing and one swimming; and a pregnant woman and her husband holding his hand with two kids playing in front of them. We reflected on the images, both immediately after the exercise, and the following morning. I pointed out that there was a strong emphasis on family and the "white picket fence" ideal (S 2). Patti noted that the images all looked "clean" in terms of there being an absence of drugs (R 1). Rachel agreed that this was her ideal – "A good healthy life without drugs. To have my husband and my children and we're just happy" (S 2). Karen, however, rejected the first family image, suggesting there was too much noise (R 1). The next day, she elaborated, "I had all that and I couldn't stand it" (S 2). Karen then acknowledged that she was unable to commit to her family full time. A good life for her entailed just having visits with her partner and children, "because I know that's what I'm capable of doing" (S 2). Emma brought something different again to the discussion: "A good life for me follows my own interests. Like if I had all the money in the world, I'd just do all my hobbies – surfing, running, playing piano" (S 2).
This was the first extensive imaginative exercise that I introduced after a series of games aimed at introductions, physical warm-up and group building (R1). Certain games and exercises are explained within this thesis, but I have also included an alphabetical list (Appendix H) which describes those that have become significant throughout various parts of the study, and other more minor exercises whose details are not detailed in the body of the work. Aside from the game The Wind Takes Away, where participants must take turns to share things about themselves and see which other group members share them, the “Life is Good” tableaux was my first toe in the water in terms of accessing the women’s personal opinions and experiences. The images contained certain elements of renewal within them, two of which were tied to an idealised version of life, out of prison, with family. The exercise required that the women collectivise, even homogenise their perceptions of a good life, and the versions of renewal that were contained in the images and interpretations were indeed somewhat superficial. Only Karen introduced an element of tension into this dialogue, and her input brought a momentary feeling of depth and authenticity to the discussion. Interestingly, when I had run the same exercise in another correctional setting just months prior, the group of largely male participants had created images of parties, driving under the influence and drug use. Perhaps these women were playing the game I have described earlier, presenting sanitised images that would not reflect badly on them. The women knew that I had been invited into the centre by the authorities and therefore may report back what behaviours and attitudes I was witnessing in the program. On the other hand, these safe images may have been genuine expressions of collective desire for the women; or created in response to a theme that inherently lacked tension, or in response to a potentially unsettling environment (the drama space) in which they had not yet learned the rules. Either way, the exercise is representative of my tentative steps towards personal narrative in Living Stories, and did serve to raise discussion amongst the group. It also marked the beginning of my quest to search for the complexity and subjectivity within the idea of renewal.

**Prison, personal narrative and renewal**

In Session 3, I was keen to further explore the idea of personal narrative, and whether or not the women may be interested in using their stories as the basis for devising performance. I introduced Four-Minute Life Story, an exercise that not only led me to re-think my approach in terms of personal narrative at the time, but also highlighted how the women viewed the narrative structure of their autobiographies, and the potential they saw for personal renewal in jail. In pairs, the women exchanged their life
stories in four minutes. I then asked them to re-enact their partner’s life story using only mime. Half of the women stood in a line, each facing her partner who was sitting down facing them. When they began the re-enactment, they were lively and amused. They used inventive physical images for events such as childbirth, motherhood and arrest. But the life stories all ended in the same way: each woman stood with her hands gripping imaginary prison bars as she gazed out into the middle distance. Later on, we reflected on the exercise:

Patti: They all began the same and they all ended the same.
Diane: They all ended in jail.
Sarah: Is that the end of the life story then?
Diane: No.
Patti: No, that’s just where it’s up to now, because when I get out I’m going to have more chapters in my life.
Mandy: It’s a hiccup.
Diane: A momentary lapse of reality.
Sarah: For me there was a sense that life doesn’t really happen in here, because that’s where the story ended.
Diane: It’s on hold.
Rachel: Yeah, it’s all on hold.
Patti: This is just holding your breath.
Emma: You’re waiting – playing a waiting game.
Diane: When I was telling Patti my story, I was saying ‘when I get out, this is what I want to do...’ but then I went, hang on, this isn’t actually my life.
Emma: Like you can still be happy in here but...
Patti: Only to a certain point...
Emma: Yeah, but you’re not doing anything, you’re not...you know...
Gwen: You’re not progressing.
Rachel: My family’s out there still growing, still doing things and I’m just waiting in here until I can get home.
Diane: But on another note to that, for me, in here, it isn’t just a waste of time because I’m doing work on myself, so I’m not not growing...but that’s just my personal view.
Rachel: Yeah that’s how I feel too. (S 4)

There appears to be a kind of ambivalence here between jail as “holding your breath”, and as an opportunity for personal renewal. What may lie at the heart of this ambivalence is the tautological nature of the jail as a site for both restriction and
rehabilitation. Seen as a “stage” for the self-narratives being created here (Sarbin, 2005), the prison reflects Foucault’s (1986) notion of a transitional space that is in some ways neither one thing nor the other. Also, for many of these participants, as with most women prisoners, their connections to family and community have been severed through their imprisonment (see Goulding, 2004), and this may reinforce the sense that “real” life is carrying on outside without them. The apparent break in their personal narrative therefore seems to have impacted on how renewal is storied here. In Chapter 6, where I will explore Gwen’s story, there is a different sense that jail was providing her with a rare opportunity for personal renewal that she did not experience on the outside, but she did not elaborate on this during the conversation above. When I described the encounter above to Helen in our first interview, she made a similar observation. She described a writing exercise she had run in which she asked the women to write about a humorous incident that had happened to them recently and specified that it must have occurred while they were in jail. She said that the women had initially struggled with the whole idea, and suggested that it was vital for them not to view their life as being on hold:

It's a case of getting them to realise that this is their world now, that things do go on, and it's populated by humour, by drama, by the range of emotions and that they have to acknowledge it, not just, yeah, stop when they come inside the gate. (Helen, SI 2)

These sentiments echo O'Connor and Mullen (2011) and Thompson’s (2001) suggestions that prison theatre should not, and cannot necessarily work towards some distant rehabilitated future; and the attitudes of the women above seem to bear this out. I began to wonder that if there is such ambivalence towards the possibility for personal renewal in jail, and it often feels as if life is on hold, then perhaps my role as a practitioner was to try to bring a sense of life to this limbo and enrich the present rather than look towards the future.

The conversation following the Four-Minute Life Story exercise took a further interesting turn in terms of personal narratives:

Diane: I found that I’m a bit sick of telling my story because it’s all of that that I want to move on from, so I’m a little bit… I want to tell the story more of what I’m going to do, not the story of where I’ve been, do you know what I mean? I’m a little bit tired of telling my story.

Gwen: Yeah because you have to do it so often.
Rachel: Yeah, that's why I kept mine to minimum when I was telling it 'cos
I'm just sick of it.
Sarah: So why are we tired of telling it – where else are we telling it?
Gwen: Well we have to tell it to 763 different authorities. We have reviews,
we have assessments, we have all those things going on. And then
when it comes time for parole, you've got to write it all down, yeah,
it's just a constant repetition of the past.
Emma: I think another thing might be that you're tired of the life you've had
and you want to start living a better life.
Gwen: Thank you, yeah.
Emma: It's like you want to leave that behind you. Not so much as having to
re-tell it, it's just you're tired of it.

[Others agree.]
Rachel: When you meet girls in here and you sit down and tell each other
things and, yeah.
Sarah: So you tell each other, you tell the authorities, and you're also
thinking about the fact that you want to move on?
Patti: Moving on, yeah.
Gwen: It's very hard to forward-think when you're still being dragged back
to...
Diane: Yeah, that's not really where I was coming from, it's not so much
I'm sick of telling the authorities my story, it's just I'm sick of living
by my story.
Emma: She's tired of it – she's not tired of telling it.
Diane: Yeah, yeah, yeah. (S 4)

Through this conversation, it seems evident that the women were tired not only of
telling their story over and over again, but more importantly, as Diane pointed out,
having to live by it. For them, there was no opportunity for renewal in this constant
retelling. This passage reflects Foucault's (1991) notion of the "coercive theatre" of
modern imprisonment, where the offender's life story is repetitively examined for
evidence of causality for their crime (pp. 251-252). In the contemporary bureaucracy of
assessment meetings, parole hearings and other administrative procedures, the personal
narrative is repeated in order to gather additional information such as the prisoner's
psychological needs, the presence of contrition, and the potential for recidivism.
Whereas some prison theatre approaches appear to successfully use personal narrative
as the basis for devised performance (Clark, 2004; Gladstone & McLewin, 1998;
Heritage, 2004a, 2004b; McKean, 2006; Rolling, 2013; Sepinuck, 2011; Weaver, 2009),
this conversation affected my approach over the remainder of the program, where I resolved to focus also on fictional and aspirational roles and narratives, and move away from reminiscence or testimonial forms of devised theatre for our final performance.

**Participation and Process in Living Stories**

In the previous sections, I have introduced how habitual narratives and roles might have operated within the actual frame of the context. There is an acknowledgement that these habitual narratives and roles are integral to the poetics of self- and world-creation, and therefore form the basis for any innovation and potential movement towards renewal. I have also begun to explore the potential impact of these habitual narratives and roles on how renewal was experienced and storied in BWCC, and how, paradoxically, renewal itself can become habitually expressed in a context such as a prison. I will now interrogate more closely the drama practices that I undertook in Living Stories, continuing to use the aesthetic lens that I have established for the study. This will bring the artistic frame of the drama workshop program into focus, and will introduce how the participants may have experienced spontaneity, improvisation and the expressive modes of narrative and role through Living Stories as an art of participation and process.

The episodes described in the previous sections signal my decision to move away from the life narratives of participants and the kind of testimonial work I had done in the Moving On project (see Bundy, 2006b; Woodland, 2009). Yet I continued to be interested in how the artistic and actual frames intersected – the art-life rhythm - and this is reflected in the exercises I introduced and the research and reflective questions that I continued to ask throughout the program. As I have described earlier, my practice in Living Stories was essentially a range of brief experiments with approaches such as image theatre, therapeutic drama, text-based work, improvisation games, drama skills development and process drama; finally finishing with group devised performance. This occurred as I searched simultaneously for my own renewed voice as a practitioner, and the forms that I felt would respond best to the context. In this rather unfocused experimentation, I inadvertently pointed the work away from perhaps the most vital precursor to renewal in applied theatre: the facilitation of frequent and sustained periods of aesthetic engagement for the participants. The potential for such aesthetic engagement was also thwarted by the operational struggles that I experienced in simply running the program: getting the women cleared by the authorities to attend, and cleared to stay in the room for the duration of our two-hour sessions. While certain
moments and exercises in the project did yield interesting insights in terms of aesthetic experience, moments of deeper aesthetic engagement in which participants might have experienced what Dewey (1934) describes as aesthetic emotion appeared to be few and fleeting. As such, Living Stories could be described as a “good enough drama” (Rasmussen, 2010), a phenomenon that appears, on the face of it, difficult to analyse aesthetically, but which I would suggest exists quite commonly in applied theatre and prison theatre. While we often strive for aesthetically powerful work in applied theatre, it can be difficult to achieve and, following Balfour (2009), it may be fruitful therefore to explore the aesthetic at work in “a theatre of little changes.”

**Improvisation and spontaneity**

In the previous section, I have introduced the idea that the structure and routine within the prison left little opportunity for spontaneity, this being one of the key aspects of the drama that participants noted early on as being in stark contrast to regular life within the jail. In Chapter 2, I have established that spontaneity is a key element of the art of process, involving the integration of emotion with judgement, and habit with innovation in an absorbing somatic, and potentially somaesthetic sense, which leads towards embodied forms of knowing and potential renewal (see Dewey, 1934; Fesmire, 2003; Granger, 2001, 2010; Johnstone, 1999, 2007; Nohl, 2009; O’Neill, 1995; Sawyer, 2000; Shusterman, 2000a, 2009a, 2011a; Taylor & Warner, 2006). The potential for spontaneity in Living Stories existed in improvisation based processes such as image theatre, improvisation games and devised performance; as well as the more general drama games that we played for warm-up, focus and performance skills development, and in the unrehersed readings and responses to texts.

One of the key observations that several women made early on, and some repeated through the program was that some of the more basic games and exercises that we did encouraged them to think, or to think differently. In the first session, I had introduced exercises such as Make Together, Frozen Films and the “Life is Good” image exercise described earlier in this chapter. I observed that the women had thrown themselves enthusiastically into all of the exercises, and I was quite surprised that they had not appeared to be at all nervous or reserved. Session 2 included games like Liar and Postcards. In discussing the game Liar, the women reflected that it encouraged skills in “quick thinking” and “thinking on the spot” (S 2). Fiona went on to suggest that the exercises were, “Re-structuring my whole thinking” (S 2). Reflecting on Session 3, when I asked what everyone would take away from the session, Emma again replied,
“Thinking on the spot” (S 3). Although I did not explore with participants the mechanics of the “thinking” that was required in these improvisation based games and exercises, there is a sense that the women appreciated an opportunity to respond spontaneously and exercise what I would suggest was more than just thinking. I find it interesting that in these descriptions, the women emphasise the cognitive activity that occurs as part of the spontaneous response, but not on its somatic potentials in terms of emotion and embodied action. It seems possible that in some cases the women could have been referring to the embodied integration of cognition, imagination, emotion and action that Dewey (1934) describes as vital to aesthetic engagement; or the integration of thinking and feeling – as Bundy (2003a) puts it “thinkingly feeling” or “feelingly thinking” (p. 172) – that many describe as a key element of aesthetic engagement in the arts more broadly (see Abbs, 1989; Best, 1992; Bruner, 1986; Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1995; Johnson, 2007; Witkin, 1974) and in drama specifically (G. M. Bolton, 1984; Bundy, 2003b; Courtney, 1995; Gallagher, 2005; A. Jackson, 2005; Taylor & Warner, 2006).

Patti in particular was an interesting case in terms of spontaneity in improvisation. From the outset, she described herself as the “entertainer” of the group (S 2), and talked about how she had a natural instinct for improvisation, but that it was always “about nothing” and just designed to make people laugh. “It gets us through,” she said, indicating that it was her way of coping with jail (S 2). Indeed, I had noted that she consistently provided a high voltage spark of humour and energy to the group. However, she made the distinction with the drama exercises in that she actually had to think, and work according to a structure (S 2). Helen echoed Patti’s comments much later during my first interview with her and Nancy about the program. She said that Patti had been enthusiastically involved in a number of activities and events at BWCC such as ANZAC Day, Remembrance Day and the choir, but that she “could be quite troublesome because she didn’t know any boundaries” (Helen, SI 1). Helen had been concerned about Patti joining drama because she thought she may become “bumptious” and “disruptive”, however, she soon observed that the drama workshops had made a difference in Patti’s behaviour:

At International Women’s day, there was a marked difference after she had attended drama, and it seemed that she had set boundaries for herself. . . . She had learned to keep to a script, instead of just tending to throw it away and do what she felt like at the time. And she was not trying to overshadow anyone else. (Helen, SI 1)
In the reflection after Session 4, when I asked people how they were feeling, Patti replied, “I love it. It’s where the best of me comes out. I cackle” (S 4). The “best of her” was being put under the spotlight and channelled to great effect in the context of the drama, and I remember numerous times when she demonstrated this. Patti was released from BWCC, leaving the program halfway through, and before we had moved into the more involved devising process. However, it seems that the opportunity to exercise her natural flair for improvisation and to be spontaneous within a collaborative structure, had regulated Patti’s behaviour elsewhere and impacted on her relationships with others. Patti’s story reflects the micro-macro nature of the habit-renewal rhythm, whereby in the moment of the game, embodied habits were reworked via spontaneity towards innovation in response to the unfolding drama (see O’Neill, 1995, pp. 79-80). Yet on a larger scale, Patti may have been engaging in habitual impulsive, “bumptious” behaviour, and reworking this towards a renewed respect for the structures of the drama and the ethics of collaboration, which was reflected in her performance at International Women’s Day. This echoes Johnstone’s (1999) measure of quality improvisation, in which participants subordinate their individual needs to those of the story and the collective (pp. 339-340), and Fesmire’s (2003) assertion that improvisation reflects ethical participation in the world. It also potentially marks a shift in Patti towards artistry, wherein there existed a “fusion” between “necessary conditions and the spontaneity and novelty of individuality” (Dewey, 1934, p. 281).

Patti’s story also points towards a sense of success and mastery (and conversely limitation and failure) that is possible to achieve in improvisation, something that contributes significantly to participants’ engagement. In my reflections on Session 4, I noticed that everyone threw themselves into most exercises with a great deal of commitment both physically and imaginatively. Games such as Wild West, Holiday Snaps and Mime it Down the Line were fun and successful, with a sense that the group was working well together. When I asked the group “what do people feel after the drama?” Emma was the first to answer with, “happy” and then after a few responses from other participants, she said, “I feel more intelligent”; and again later, “I feel intelligent today” (Emma, S 4). This response again may reflect the kind of integrative thinking-feeling that is required to achieve success in improvisation. Patti used the word “enthuesised” and when Diane corrected her, she said “No, I know it’s enthusiastic, but enthuesised!” (S 4). She was using her imagination to invent a word that pointed more towards enthusiasm being done to her, rather than it being there already. Diane said, “I feel orange” (S 4) – a far more imaginative response than participants usually gave.
during our check-ins at the start of each session. Listening back to the recording, I was
struck by the enthusiastic and up-beat tone of the reflection. My observations over the
course of the program suggest that the group became progressively better at
improvisation, becoming familiar with the structures and then finding ways to be playful
within them. This is not uncommon when it comes to improvisation (see Johnstone,
1999, 2007), and I would suggest that there appeared to be a certain level of somatic,
even somaesthetic engagement that was achieved when the games went well. The group
became so successful at improvisation games that we decided to include them as part of
our final presentation, reasoning that they were a demonstration of the performance
skills of the group, and would be entertaining and engaging for the audience (J 21; J 22;
J 23).

Along side this apparent skill and enthusiasm, one participant, Grace, appeared
to struggle with improvisation, and did not always enjoy the same level of success and
satisfaction as the other women. During almost every exercise that required an
individual response, for example Word-at-a-Time Story, Grace would spend what felt
like an eternity thinking before she spoke or moved. This was often made more
uncomfortable by her awkward giggling – and I would cringe slightly as I felt the other
participants losing patience or becoming covertly derisive. But after these pregnant
pauses, she would finally make a decision, and when she did so, she was committed and
enthusiastic in performance (see CR 2). On a number of occasions, Grace herself
described the difficulty that she had with spontaneity in improvisation games (II 2; J 21;
R 11). During our reflection in Session 22 she observed, “That’s my strength and my
weakness... The weakness is not knowing exactly what I’m doing at that point to go
into it, but once it clicks on, then I’m into it then my strength kicks in” (Grace, S 22).
Grace was the only participant who seemed to really struggle with improvisation, and
who deconstructed the process in this way. It is impossible to know the source of her
difficulty, and whether it was due to any particular form of binding that had been
established over the course of her life story. But although it often seemed a challenge,
there were moments when she appeared to experience the success that I noticed in the
others. In Session 14, Grace seemed to be enjoying herself throughout. I observed her
playfully doing some Gene Kelly style dance moves in the Queen Game; and staying
focused during an improvisation with Cassie in which it would have been easy to fall
apart laughing (as she often had previously) (R 14). When it came to reflecting on the
session, she observed, “There was a bit of flow happening today.” She even made this
comment with more confidence and clarity than she had used in previous reflections.
She emphasised the word “flow” very playfully (Grace, S 14). In my journal, I noted that as a group, the women had been energetic and enthusiastic in this session, although we had struggled at one point due to low numbers (J 14). It is therefore difficult to know where the source of this “flow” was for Grace – whether she was feeling the alignment of positive energies in the group, or whether Grace herself felt particularly engaged that day. And if she did feel engaged, whether this was the cause or the outcome of her positive, successful participation, or both. Grace might indeed have been identifying the dynamic form of the workshop experience: that, taken as a whole, the process possessed a “pervasive quality” that gave her a sense of satisfaction - a quality that Alexander (1998), drawing on Dewey (1934), argues is suggestive of aesthetic experience (p. 15).

These examples illustrate the potential of spontaneity in improvisation that existed within Living Stories. While improvisation and drama games are not necessarily the most dense or sophisticated examples of the potential for aesthetic engagement, they nevertheless appeared to engage the women somatically, sometimes somaesthetically, and at times reflected the rhythm between habit and innovation that Granger (2001, 2006, 2010) and Shusterman (2000a, 2009a, 2011a) suggest can lead towards renewal. The case stories in the following chapters will explore this aspect of the art of process in more detail, uncovering some of the deeper complexities of spontaneity and renewal.

Narrative

Along side the sense that some of the women were sick of their stories, and of telling their stories, participants such as Aamira, Emma, Gwen and Tina continued throughout the process to share their personal histories with me during reflective discussions, interviews and casual pre- and post-session conversations, but this most often occurred on a one-to-one basis. It is possible that this was due to the prevailing culture of disclosure that already existed for the women, augmented by my own exploratory approach to personal narrative. I may have opened the gates for these stories to be shared due to some of the exercises that explicitly dealt with personal story, as well as interview questions that focused on the intersections between the roles the women were playing and their own personalities and identities (Appendix B). Yet there may be other reasons why these particular women seemed keen to share their stories, perhaps an opportunity to tell their side of the story to me, a visitor who had come to know them over the course of the program; or perhaps simply a need to be heard. Regardless of the reasons why, the telling of these stories existed as examples of self-creation that
occurred in concert with, but outside the workshop process – a phenomenon that I would suggest is integral to aesthetic experience in many examples of applied theatre. Approaching this through the aesthetic frame I have established for the study, these narratives of self-creation were performed not only in the telling, but also in the participants’ embodied habitual responses to the new context of the drama workshop. These narratives therefore held the different forms of binding that had built up within the soma, but also the seeds for their renewal within the art of participation and process.

Despite my resolve to move away from addressing the women’s personal narratives of the past explicitly through devised performance, and the issues that I faced in the critical incident of Session 2 as described in the next chapter, I did continue to explore elements of the women’s personal experiences and aspirations in ways that I believed might be more positive and/or gentle. One such example was the Superheroes exercise that I ran in Session 13, where I drew on some drama therapy training that I had previously received while I was with Geese, to deliver a session that might invite the women into a reflective exploration of their aspirations via the creation of a superhero version of themselves. At this point, I was pursuing a more therapeutic agenda, and while I have since turned away from such approaches, it brought about some interesting tensions, particularly in terms of Gwen’s story as I will explore in Chapter 6. Another example was the more playful game Once-Upon-a-Time in Session 5, in which participants were asked to sit in a line of three, with person one starting to tell a brief story from their life. As soon as a word came up in the story that triggered a story in someone else, that person would call out, “Stop!” state the word, and start telling her own story. This game brought up some more light-hearted autobiographical material from the women that was tinged with humour and, in the case of Rachel and Patti, hallucinogenic drug-fuelled adventure (S 5). A third example of my explicit use of personal narrative was the Significant Objects exercise that I ran in Session 7. In this exercise, I asked participants to each share the story of an object that was special to them, to describe what it was, where it had come from and what made it special, and then in small groups to create images from these stories.

The women’s responses to these more explicitly autobiographical exercises were mixed, and there was certainly some caution and resistance around sharing personal narrative material. In response to the Significant Objects exercise, Mandy asked, “Does it have to be real?” (J 7) and then chose instead to share a fictional object (see also Chapter 8). Patti chose not to move into the next stage of creating an image from her story, instead she left to go to the bathroom, and returned once the exercise was
finished (J 7). Grace was often reluctant to share even the most basic details about her life both within the drama exercises and more generally. Grace was a black woman who spoke as if she was from somewhere in the Caribbean. When I asked people where they were from during our first group interview, she described herself as an “all rounder” and that she did not wish to disclose her culture (GI 1). During the Four-Minute Life Story exercise, she struggled with the idea of sharing her real life and we agreed that in her case, it could be fictional. At the end of the session I spoke to her alone and asked her if she was feeling okay about the exercise. She said she was fine but added, “You have to be careful what you say in here” (R 4). During the game Once-Upon-a-Time, she asked me if she could use fictional stories for the exercise. She began telling her story and then said, “I’ll put myself in it” – meaning that she would speak in the first person - as a concession to the game (Grace, S 5). This seemed to demonstrate a deliberate manipulation of the tension between fact and fiction. During the Superheroes exercise, Grace seemed unclear about what was required, and when I tried to explain a couple of different ways she became confused, finally saying, “That’s okay I’ll just make it up” (R 13). In reflecting on this exercise in the group, she seemed torn between admitting that the character had some basis in her real self, and denying it (Grace, S 13).

After this session, Grace approached me alone and explained that she had found the exercise difficult because she did not like sharing personal details in front of others in the group. During this conversation, she admitted that she did not want the information to be used against her, and when I asked her why she felt she could not disclose her cultural background during the group interview, and she said something like, “Because a certain person wants to find out.” She did not go into any more detail than that (J 13). This echoed Tina’s trepidation about sharing personal information in the context of the criminogenic programs as described earlier. These episodes, and the ones that I will explore in the chapters that follow certainly impacted on how I now approach personal narrative in this context, where for someone like Grace, there was significant risk in exposing details about one’s life, whether these are to do with past experiences, hopes, aspirations, or even seemingly straightforward information such as race. They appear to represent another example of binding, a clear manifestation of Easteal’s (2001) dysfunctional self-protective mechanism: “don’t talk”.

Other exercises that I introduced encouraged the creation of fictional narratives within the artistic frame, although at times, like the sharing of personal narratives described in the previous section, this process occasionally appeared to walk a blurry line between fact and fiction. The improvisation games and exercises that I have
described above invited participants to spontaneously create fictional narratives and roles that would serve the unfolding improvised action. When these were successful, they possessed the inherent narrative structure that precipitates engagement for the players and spectators and drives the action forward (see Dunn, 2011; O'Neill, 1995). During Session 10, we were doing a Character Building exercise in which the participants had to create fictional characters from a series of “walks” and then these characters were interviewed in a hot seat talk-show format (R10). Participants who were not being interviewed were invited to ask questions from the audience. My reflection from that session demonstrates a strong collaborative narrative sense between Rachel (who was in the audience) and Mandy (who was portraying the character of a famous archaeologist):

[Rachel] asked Mandy’s character: “We heard that two years ago, you lost two toes on your right foot and there were all kinds of rumours about how that happened – can you please tell us the real story?” Mandy then responded with an elaborate story about excavating Tutankhamen’s Tomb and stepping into a trap.

(R10)

In Session 8, I brought in a range of objects in a treasure chest: a picture frame, an old book, a tiny gift-wrapped box, a polished stone and a large piece of red velveteen fabric. After a discussion about how these objects could be used symbolically, I invited the group to use these ideas as a springboard to create short devised scenes. Gwen, who was a natural storyteller, drove one of the scenes that revolved around the “stone of time” that enabled her to travel back and meet Patti in role as a Roman emperor (R8). For the second scene, Mandy started driving a story about Leonardo da Vinci travelling forward in time to meet Vincent van Gough and writing secret codes in a book. We agreed in reflection afterwards that the second scene had been less successful because it did not contain the essential elements of action and tension to drive the narrative forward. Rachel even admitted that she could see that it was going to “fail” when the scene was first discussed, and that was why she had been reluctant to participate as a performer (R8). Other examples of fictional narrative in Living Stories included our work with extracts from Caryl Churchill’s (1985) Vinegar Tom, the creation of scenarios based on short blank texts, the narratives that were built around characters such as Joan of Arc (the focus of a play building exercise in Session 15) and the devised work we did to create our Inspiring Women from History performance.

As I will explore in the chapters that follow, some of the fictional improvised scenarios seemed to draw upon participants’ actual experiences and roles, for example,
depicting scenes of crime. In Chapter 7, the risky alignment between fictional and actual narratives in these and other devised processes is fully explored through Tina’s story. In the case of Aamira, I had the sense that the personal narrative she shared with me in a one-to-one conversation at the start of Session 6 was a work largely embellished by fiction. In my journal from that conversation, I noted that she shared details of her life for an hour non-stop, and that these included what I thought were “overblown” and “fantastical” accounts of her being adopted as a child in Singapore, raised as a Muslim and then wandering the globe looking for answers through a number of different religious and spiritual practices. She also described her offence, which she said had been fraud-related and motivated by greed (J 6). In the Superheroes exercise in Session 13, she continued with this thread, creating the character of “Wonder Woman” – a kind of pacifist warrior-woman who travelled the globe solving people’s problems and sending a message of peace. After introducing her character, Aamira said that she herself had done some of this kind of travelling around the world and speaking against the fundamentalist version of Islam that she said had resulted in so much killing and conflict. She said that this is what had got her in trouble and put her behind bars (S 13), although this contradicted what she had told me previously about fraud. These accounts may have been true, or they may have been works of fiction with elements of truth, but throughout Aamira’s participation in Living Stories, I had the sense that she possessed a strong imagination that perhaps infused the telling of her life story. For example, during the Queen Game in which players must approach the fictional queen and offer her gifts and favours in order to get closer, I reflected that she “came up with the most vivid and elaborate description of a fairy-land like place for Rachel (who was the Queen and loved fairies). It was extremely fanciful, with magic carpets and fountains of vodka” (R 9). When Aamira herself had the opportunity to be queen, she relished it, “I felt privileged to be a queen today – I wish it was real!” She went on to say it had been great to have people offering you gifts and praising you (R 9). She referred back to this experience a number of times over the course of the program, clearly having enjoyed the role of Queen immensely (S 15; GI 1; R 11). In this story, it is impossible to maintain a rigid boundary between narrative and role. Aamira’s roles as a pacifist warrior, a queen and a religious messenger may have been bound-up with her ways of coping with a difficult life narrative. I could not help but feel that perhaps she was using her highly imaginative storytelling skills to respond to the drama, as well as to construct a seemingly fanciful autobiography; and that she was weaving the two together in her own poetics of self-creation.
Regardless of the muddy waters between fictional and actual material in these narratives; whether the narratives were created in the context of improvisation games or long-form devised and text-based work; or indeed whether the narratives were works drawing from autobiography or “pure” fiction; the narrative processes I have described sometimes seemed to evoke a kind of narrative engagement, which I propose as being a form of engagement that draws participants in by virtue of their interest in the unfolding story, and their commitment to its development. Carroll (1997) recognises the role of emotion in this kind of engagement in works of fiction, and Goldie (2012) extends this to explore the emotional quality of engagement in narrative structure as it occurs in both art and life. As I have suggested in Chapter 2, an embodied version of this emotionally driven narrative engagement must certainly be relevant to participants in applied theatre (see Dunn, 2011; O’Neill, 1995). The example above of Rachel’s reaction to our Leonardo da Vinci story possibly bears this out. She was aware early on of the narrative shortcomings of our scene, and therefore became disengaged due to its potential to fail, perhaps also reluctant have this failure reflect on her as a player in the scene. On the other hand, through the Joan of Arc and Inspiring Women from History devising processes, some participants such as Gwen, Emma and Mandy seemed demonstrably engaged in the narratives of the women whose lives they were exploring. Similarly, participants such as Rachel, Emma and Gwen appeared to be strongly engaged in the creation of narratives from the Blank Text exercise that I introduced in Session 12 (see Gwen, II 1; R 12). Rachel later recalled this exercise to two new members who had joined the group, “She gave us two lines the other day, and just from those two lines, we made up a little story line and it went really well (S 14). Bruner (1990) draws attention to the “factual indifference” of narratives (p. 50; see also 1991b), suggesting that our engagement in them is not necessarily predicated upon fact or fiction. Aamira’s storying of her experiences as described above led me to view all of the narratives in Living Stories with a similar kind of factual indifference. Their verifiability was unimportant in regards to their value as compelling signifiers to the poetics of self-and world-creation in the project. While narrative engagement may not always elicit the integrative thinking-feeling or aesthetic emotion that I have described elsewhere as being key to aesthetic engagement, I do propose that it is nonetheless a significant aspect of the art of process in applied theatre, and is therefore a significant aspect of how the experience is viewed through an aesthetic frame. Narrative engagement in applied theatre (and in life) draws participants, often collectively, into the dynamic form of the story, and enlists them in creating its breaches, secrets and disturbances as they move it towards consummation.
Role

In Chapter 2, I have described how I conceive role as it operates across all frames as the object in the subject-object rhythm of the creative process. The enactment of "possible selves," (O'Neill, 1995, p. 79) or the expansion of the "role repertoire" (see Baim et al., 2002; Emunah, 1994; Landy, 1994, 2001) in the context of a shared culture has implications for both personal and cultural renewal. From a somaesthetic perspective, the creative process of taking a new role may ameliorate some of the negative habits that have built up in the soma and been performed repeatedly over the course of a lifetime (see Shusterman 2000a, 2009a, 2011a). Yet in improvised drama, these habits, as Heathcote (1995) points out, are integral to how participants “read the situation” and spontaneously respond in role to the unfolding narrative (as cited in O'Neill, 1995, pp. 79-80). In role, the participant may experience a metaxic tension between the subjective emotions, ideas, beliefs and opinions of the self and those that are represented objectively through the role (see G. M. Bolton, 1984, p. 122), potentially giving rise to renewed emotional connections and nuances. At their best, these moments might also lead to aesthetic emotion (Dewey, 1934) – a heightened form or awareness or knowing that also contains within it the seeds of renewal. The bound-up prison person is a role (or collection of roles) that I have described earlier in this chapter as being a key analytical tool in exploring this terrain in Living Stories. My analysis of aesthetic engagement and renewal through role has, to some degree, become an interrogation of the potential for unbinding within the process, whether this was enacted in the artistic, or the actual frame – or both. I would suggest that unbinding through the enactment of role may take two forms: the somatic, or somaesthetic engagement in the role, where the habits of the soma are reworked and performed in new ways that lead to expansion of the self; and the notion that certain habitual roles (or aspects of them) can be unbound or freed from the habitual narratives that contain them.

I have already begun to touch upon how participants performed versions of themselves in the actual frame, for example, the vivid personal narrative that Aamira shared with me where, I believe, there were certain roles in which she had cast herself as the protagonist in her epic story. Similarly, I have discussed some of the habitual bound-up roles that may have been present in the adversarial narratives at BWCC, and these are explored further through the chapters that follow. I have also begun to describe strategies that I used in Living Stories that invited participants into performances of self within the artistic frame: the aspirational version of self in the Superheroes exercise, and the narration and representation of personal experiences through exercises like
Significant Objects and Once-Upon-a-Time. Other moments within the artistic frame of the drama brought to light roles that appeared to be important to the participants’ self-creation. Patti’s claim that she was an entertainer appeared to be an important role that she saw herself play in the prison, and one that translated particularly well to the drama context. Aside from Karen’s rejection of the image of motherhood in the “Life is Good” images described earlier, most of the women at one time or another demonstrated an attachment to their roles as mothers. When three new people were starting the program in Session 15, I invited the group to pair up and share some facts. I included “one thing that you’re proud of”, with Grace, Rachel, Mandy and Kiana all saying that they were proud of their kids (R 15). Through certain exercises and discussions, it became evident that the reality of living in jail away from their children was a tender emotional note that struck Rachel, Gwen, Grace and Mandy; and they seemed determined to demonstrate their role as mothers, despite their physical absence from their children (see S 4; J 7; J 14; R 4; R 9).

Many more of the strategies and approaches that I have described through this chapter contained within them the opportunities for fictional role taking, whether these were spontaneous or more rehearsed. In Chapter 2, I have drawn on drama education theories as expressed by G. M. Bolton (1984), Morgan and Saxton (1989), O’Toole (1992) and O’Neill (1995) to inform my understanding of how fictional roles operated in Living Stories. I have acknowledged that in applied theatre there exists a kind of continuum between the most basic, illustrative representation of fictional roles, to more sophisticated forms of characterization. Where the acting behaviour appears on this continuum may variously depend on the demands of the performance situation, the performance styles encouraged by the facilitator, and the skill level of the participants. For O’Neill, any kind of role taking involves a certain level of self-transcendence and the embodiment of a “type in the human family” (p. 70). Following on from this, I therefore suggest that, regardless of their simplicity or sophistication, all forms of fictional role taking in applied theatre have potential in terms of renewal.

When I asked in the first session what drew them to the program, Karen said she was interested because you could become somebody else – you could have an “alter ego” (R 1). Throughout the program and in reflection afterwards, other women in the group seemed to relish the opportunity to be in role as someone other than themselves. At different points, they referred to this as “acting” (see S 3, S 4), with Gwen referring to it as “role-playing” and “pretending” (S 4). After a suggestion from Patti that a scripted play would challenge her more, there was general agreement from the others
that they would like to try this (S 4), leading me to bring *Vinegar Tom* (Churchill, 1985) to the group in Sessions 5 and 6. Aside from the potential I saw in exploring the themes within the play, I was also particularly interested in encouraging the group towards more sophisticated forms of characterization, identifying the emotions of the characters and bringing these out in their enactment. I split the group into pairs and gave them small scenes to rehearse. First I asked them to rehearse reading the scenes, and then to add their own blocking that would help to establish the relationships and status of the characters, or convey some aspect of the scene’s meaning (J 6). All the women seemed to respond well to this, and there is some closer analysis of Gwen and Mandy’s responses in the chapters that follow. At the end of Session 6, the women reflected on the scenes, making some interesting observations about the process of interpretation and characterization. Karen observed that the physical enactment of the scene increased its meaning for her, Mandy suggested that it “brings it to life” and Gwen observed a change in people’s voices when their bodies were involved. Patti also suggested that this helped her to find meaning as an actor, “I found it more expressionable [sic] when we acted it out. I could get into the lines more”. Emma and Rachel observed that there was a range of possibilities for interpreting a scene (S 6). Through these observations the women appeared to be aware of the different layers of meaning and knowing that were possible to achieve through somatic engagement in the scenes, as well as the potential for physical embodiment to assist in the self-transcendence of role.

The women also seemed to respond well to this direct work with characterization within the Character Building exercise I have mentioned in the previous section. In this exercise, I was impressed by the diversity and depth of the characters that the women created, and particularly noted Rachel’s “depth, focus and characterization” in her portrayal of her creation: a lanky 17-year-old boy who was into video gaming and packed supermarket shelves for a living. I also observed that Emma showed particular commitment to her character of “Annika” the yoga instructor; and noted that Rachel, Emma and Grace were more skilled than Gwen and Mandy at changing their voices to suit the character (R 10). At the end of the exercise, I noticed that Rachel was flushed and fanning her face. She said, “That was hard,” and when I asked her what made her keep going, and she said, “I just thought everyone’s got to do it, so I’ll just get on with it.” (R 10). In our one-to-one interview weeks later, Emma fondly remembered her character “Annika” and said, “That was heaps of fun, I really liked that day”. When I asked why, she replied, “I really liked the fact that you had to go up (snaps fingers) and be in character and try and stay in character and yeah, it was just
different” (Emma, II 1). Rachel also remembered this exercise vividly, as well as the character she created. In our first group interview, she related how she had told her cellmates about the drama and described her character to them: “I said, I was this guy called Mark Soudan and told them his whole story and they got a bit spun out by it” (Rachel, GI 1). I find it interesting that in my reflection, I noted the focus and characterization skills of Emma and Rachel, and they later remembered this exercise as being positive and engaging. This suggests that they may have been aesthetically, perhaps even somaesthetically engaged in their enactment of these roles. A feeling of artistry, even mastery, may also have come from successfully inventing and becoming these other people in role. Rachel’s affective response immediately after the exercise demonstrated the risk that she had to take in order to succeed, and I got the sense that for her this risk paid off. At the end of the program, Gwen and Rachel suggested that there should be even more work with role in subsequent projects, and they suggested that they would like to push their characterization and acting further (GI 4).

The other more extensive use of role in Living Stories came with our devised work on Inspiring Women from History, where the women chose a historical figure from a selection of cards that I handed out, and then developed scenes depicting aspects of her life story. This formed the basis for my exploration of the self-role rhythm, where I imagined that aspects of the historical figures’ stories might have something to offer the women themselves in terms of inspiration and empowerment; and similarly that we might explore how the women’s own strengths and qualities had informed the roles that they played. Throughout the process of devising and the final performance, the group’s portrayal of inspiring women (and their supporting characters) ranged from the most illustrative role taking towards more sophisticated characterization. We had only six sessions until the program finished, therefore we had very little time to develop the roles and scenes to their full aesthetic potential. This meant the potential for the players to experience deep aesthetic engagement or aesthetic emotion through role in this part of the process was consequently limited. The performance structure that I proposed to the group was inspired by theatre in education: a structure that I hoped might usefully showcase a range of the skills that the women had developed over the course of the program. We would provide the audience with an interactive, hopefully educative experience that included a showing of improvisation games in the style of theatresports; a showing of the Inspiring Women from History scenes, and a facilitated hot seat between the audience and these characters at the end. I believe that this style of performance, combined with the time restrictions, encouraged a more illustrative role playing in the
depiction of the inspiring women, and the limitations on us meant that I was also unable to perhaps explore a more aesthetically satisfying, Brechtian version of illustrative representation in role (see O'Neill, 1995; Willett, 2009). Judging by the women's comments described earlier, they would have certainly enjoyed an opportunity to push their characterization skills further than they ultimately did. Yet there still appeared to be moments of spontaneity in this process; where the women seemed to engage aesthetically, or somaesthetically in performance; and where there appeared some interesting moments of interaction, and integration between self and role.

The chapters that follow will describe how Gwen, Tina and Mandy performed their roles in the *Inspiring Women from History* scenes, playing Caroline Chisholm, Anne Frank and Mary McKillop respectively. By this point, Patti and Aamira had left the program and three other participants (Bree, Kiana and Cassie) had dropped in for only a few sessions and then left before we began working on the presentation. Emma and Grace were the other two core group members who remained, choosing Amelia Earhart and Rosa Parks respectively as their inspiring women. From the moment of choosing their inspiring woman from the selection of picture and story cards that I brought to the group, there appeared to be potential for us to explore the self-role alignment. This began with me asking each woman to reflect on what drew her to the historical figure, and what characteristics she could see from looking at the image. In Emma's case, she was immediately drawn to the dynamic image of Amelia Earhart with a cheeky smile, ruffled hair, a leather jacket and hands on her hips. Only 22 years old herself, Emma said she liked the picture because Earhart looked "fun" and "tomboyish" and as if she was saying "Yep, I can do it – I can do anything!" She said Earhart looked like she goes after her goals and is happy (R 17). This piqued my interest, because Emma herself was a very energetic, upbeat person who came across as confident and self-assured. In our first one-to-one interview weeks earlier, she had told me some of her personal story, about how she had once been very sporty and out-going, but lost her sense of self through drug use and a destructive relationship. She said that now, she was much more "goal-oriented" and she had begun to "rehabilitate" herself after her conviction. "I have more of a drive," she said, "More of an enthusiasm than I did before. So it's helping build my vivacious character," and smiled.

I said, "That's a great word."

"I love that word," she replied, "Do you know what, I found that word in a crossword, and I had to look it up because I didn't know what it meant, and I was like 'That's me, that's me, I'm vivacious!' (Emma, II 1). In our second group interview, after we had
done some work on devising the *Inspiring Women From History* performance, I asked the group if they could see any parallels between themselves and their characters (Appendix B). Emma replied, “She’s vivacious, she’s enthusiastic, she’s a bit tomboyish, which I was when I was younger, she goes after what she wants and she believes in herself.” After a bit more conversation amongst the group Emma gleefully put on the vintage Biggles-style flying cap that I had brought for the Earhart character, making the rest of the group laugh. “I chose the card for those reasons,” she said, “As soon as I saw it, I wanted it” (Emma, GI 2). Emma’s connection to the “vivacious” character of Amelia Earhart was carried through in her performance. Emma wanted to depict her meeting the press and her adoring followers after her successful trans-Atlantic flight. With my direction, she agreed to begin the scene standing on a table with her hands on her hips as an old fashioned Movietone News soundtrack played. Two of the other women then carried her down to meet the crowd. At the end of the performance, when we were doing the hot seat interview with each of the characters, I noted that Emma’s was one of the most effective responses. She was asked the question, “What made you want to fly in the first place?” She responded full of spritely energy and vigour:

> Well there were a lot of boys out there flying but no one had actually crossed the Atlantic on their own. And I grew up with parents that taught me to be physically active and to chase my dream. And I had a dream of flying – I loved flying, and I decided to, jimmenny-jeepers I’m going to get out there and do it. (Emma, S 23)

The audience laughed heartily at this. Helen, who had been in the audience, noted later that Emma’s performance had been very “out-going”, “physical” and “outward looking” which, she thought, demonstrated significant possibilities for Emma when she got out of jail (Helen, SI 2). Helen’s response may have been borne out of a desire to perpetuate the rehabilitative narrative and draw a somewhat unrealistic connection between Emma’s performance of Amelia Earhart and her chances for a successful transition into the community. But it may point to the idea that Emma was communicating a strong somaesthetic message to the audience through her physicality, and perhaps may have felt this herself in performance. Her connection to the vivaciousness of Amelia Earhart likely manifested in her spontaneous hot seat response, where she appeared to be drawing on elements of her own experience and personality to inform the role, eliciting a positive response in the audience with her inventive and humorous use of the words “jimmenny-jeepers” which she had never uttered previously in devising or rehearsal. This example demonstrates the potential that I saw for
exploring the operation of the self-role rhythm in Living Stories, and how this might become a significant part of the poetics of self-creation for the women. When I met her, Emma, like Gwen, already seemed to be consciously engaged in her own project of personal renewal, which she described to me in the sharing of her personal narrative. Amelia Earhart appeared to bring a compelling fictional role to this narrative, which Emma imbued with her returning sense of vivacity. Yet it represents a somewhat straightforward exploration of this alignment, and this was certainly not the case for all of the participants, as the stories in the chapters that follow will demonstrate.

Conclusion

Through this chapter, I have conducted a broader analysis of the context of BWCC, and the practice of Living Stories using the aesthetic lens that I have established for the study: it represents an initial exploration of the theory along side the practice, in order to frame the closer exploration that follows in Chapters 5-8. Within this analysis, there is a sense that the environment of the jail became a significant element of the aesthetic experience that occurred within it. I have suggested that the art of participation in Living Stories, the overarching self-world rhythm, is concerned with the world-making that existed in BWCC, but also the poetics of self-creation within that world. The habitual narratives and bound-up roles that were performed within this environment existed in tension with the new ones that were explored in the workshop space. This positioned the space, not as a sanctuary fenced off from the punitive machinery of the jail, but with boundaries that were permeable and sometimes risky; and these tensions informed the kinds of knowing, and thus the personal and cultural renewal that were possible. This chapter also begins to demonstrate the rhythm between the actual-artistic and the fictional-factual in the project, again interrogating how these frames interacted within the art of process.

I have also begun to interrogate the nature of the women’s engagement in Living Stories. Improvisation and spontaneity were aspects of the program that engaged many of the women in thinking, or thinking differently, and this is explored in terms of the potential for a somatic, or somaesthetic integration between thinking and feeling in the rhythm between habit and innovation. Through Patti’s story, consideration has also been given to the ethical potential of group improvisation exercises that can, at their best, model ethical participation in the world. I have also considered role and narrative as embodied modes of expression that are integral to the poetics of self-creation and
thus the potential for personal and cultural renewal within the arts of participation and process.

The opportunities for role taking and narrative engagement in Living Stories have also been explored, in the actual and artistic frames, and also in the fictional frame as it existed in some of the processes that I introduced to the women. Beginning with the role of the bound-up prison person, I have begun to explore the potential for unbinding to occur, where this might mean that habitual roles can be reworked within the soma, and actual roles might be liberated from their habitual narratives.

My exploration of narrative in Living Stories is underpinned by the idea that narrative truth is indifferent to fact and fiction, and that both of these can elicit a form of narrative engagement that becomes part of the process. I have begun to describe the self-creation that was present within the disclosure of personal narratives outside of the artistic frame by Aamira for example, whose story I suggest became interwoven with the imaginative, artistic context of the drama space. My attempts at explicit exploration of personal narrative through the process had mixed responses, and the tensions of this process are discussed in terms of the risk involved in self-disclosure – particularly for participants like Grace and Tina, who appeared to feel a sense of danger (and this risk will be analysed more closely in the next chapter). In the cases of both Grace and Tina, it appeared that they were deliberately manipulating the tension between fact and fiction in their personal narratives order to meet their needs within the environment of the jail. I have further suggested that narrative engagement, while it may not elicit aesthetic emotion, nevertheless involves the creator (or co-creators) in an aesthetic process of engaging with the dynamic form of experience, progressing this towards consummation.

As an art of living the drama program appeared to create space for some forms of renewal, but it has become clear that these were complex rhythmic processes between habit and innovation, between the actual and the artistic frames, and between the fictional and the factual in role and narrative. While the program did not provide participants with numerous or sustained periods of aesthetic engagement, it did represent an opportunity for the women to engage in, and for me to explore the poetics of self-creation in this context, and how this interacted with the world-making and potential for cultural renewal within the prison. This chapter describes the whole song, in which a range of melodies, harmonies, rhythms and counter-rhythms worked together to reveal the dynamic form of Living Stories to me as an experience.
Chapter 5. The Game: Lola’s story

It's all about the game and how you play it,
All about control and if you can take it,
All about your debt and if you can pay it,
It's all about pain and who's gonna make it. (J. A. Johnston, 2002)

Introduction

As I have described in Chapter 3, the backbone of my analysis and discussion of Living Stories is made up of four individual case stories, which are explored through the theoretical lens that I have established in Chapter 1. These stories are sequenced according to how they progressively deepen and develop my understanding of Living Stories through the four key principles: The art of knowing, the art of participation, the art of process and the art of living. Within this framework, I will look more closely at the nature of the women's engagement (and aesthetic engagement) in the program, the potential for renewal, and the complexity of that renewal process. For this chapter, I will focus on a particularly difficult early session, because it represents a critical incident in terms of reflective practice (see G. Bolton, 2006), where a range of factors, including my choices as a practitioner, led to a sense of danger and conflict in the space that was centred around my relationship with one participant in particular, Lola. Lola also had two close friends with her, Karen and Tracy, who also feature in this story. Submitting this series of events to scrutiny and analysis is an uncomfortable process for me, as it shines a stark light on my uncertainty, lack of focus and personal weaknesses at the beginning of Living Stories. As I have described elsewhere, at this early stage I was trying to find new rhythms for working in a prison setting, but in this session my musicianship seemed to be clumsy, out of step and jarring. On the other hand, these events very quickly focused me in order to move forward as a more effective practitioner – to renew my own approach to the inherent rhythms within the process.

This critical incident will tell a story about how habitual roles and narratives as I have described in the previous chapter, can be played out to negative effect in the fast moving current of a drama workshop process. It will also explore how roles and narratives that have been established in the actual frame can interact with the artistic frame, and the necessity to effectively balance the fictional with the factual when dealing with the life experiences of potentially vulnerable participants. There is a heavier
emphasis on my own experience and facilitation in this chapter than the ones that follow, chiefly due to the fact that I was a key player in perpetuating the habitual bound-up roles and adversarial narratives that seemed to infuse the session. I have adopted the somewhat unsophisticated metaphor of the game to inform this analysis, perhaps reflecting some of my unsophisticated responses to events. The notion of jail as an adversarial game seemed to penetrate the artistic frame of the drama workshop in this session, where we were also engaged in playing other games. As a critical incident, the chapter follows the temporal narrative structure of the workshop from start to finish, and then goes on to explore the potential significance of what took place in terms of engagement and renewal.

**Positioning the Players**

I structured the first two sessions of the program with a range of games and exercises that I hoped would engage the women without putting them under too much pressure, and help me broadly gauge the personalities, attitudes and capabilities in the group. During these sessions, I also aimed to explain the research process, gain informed consent and begin recording the reflections of our experiences and observations (see R 1; R 2). The first session had contained a series of introductory group-building games and finished with the “Life is Good” images that I have described in the previous chapter. This session had appeared to be very positive, with high levels of energy, participation and animated discussion (J 1; R 1). The women had seemed to respond well to our brief foray into the aspirational personal narratives of the images, and we continued to discuss these at the beginning of Session 2, where they commented on the nature of the images and what they depicted (see Chapter 4). Yet along side this positivity, I also had already begun to have some reservations about three participants in particular. Lola, Karen and Tracy were all physically very large and imposing women, and they spoke and carried themselves with an intimidating air. I described them in my reflection as the “Big Three” (R 2), and they had been the most vocal in all of our discussions and reflections during Session 1. Although, at first, I did not feel intimidated directly by them, and I was pleasantly surprised by the group’s level of enthusiasm, I certainly sensed an undercurrent of secrecy and danger in the room emanating from them. Based purely on my gut feeling, and no overt aggression on the part of these women, I noted that I felt more at risk from them than I had in any of my previous work in prisons (J 1). I wonder now about the source of this feeling of high danger, and how it influenced my reactions to the events that followed.
In the departmental training session that I attended after Session 2, the trainer informed us that some of the women in the centre were referred to as “heavies” (J 3) – a role within the prison hierarchy that has different names throughout the world, but its characteristics are the same: a high status power broker within the jail who uses physical violence (or the threat of it), as well as other forms of manipulation, to exert their influence over inmates and staff for their own ends. I would suggest therefore that heavy is one of the bound-up habitual roles that exist within the adversarial narrative of the prison environment - a way to navigate through the game without feeling a loss of power or control. This role has become integral to how people come to know the context of the prison, and negotiate their own (and understand others’) positions within its hierarchy. I assumed that the Big Three were probably heavies, and in our debrief after Session 2, the Education Officer Nancy confirmed that this was certainly the case for Lola (J 3). These three women also brought highly sexual references into the games and improvisations, something that I had not ever encountered on such a scale with adults in my previous work (J 1). After Session 1, Helen and Nancy alarmed me with their description of Lola in particular: “She is a sexual predator – just make sure you keep your distance” (J 1). I remember asking whether she was a predator towards fellow prisoners, or towards staff, to which they replied “both.” I recall that they then described an incident in which Lola and another prisoner had openly engaged in a sexual act in front of one of the education tutors (J 2), and suggested that her behaviour in my session was designed to test me. The words “sexual predator” rang loudly in my ears and filled my head with vivid imagery of what this might mean. This was a highly charged, dangerous role that evoked visceral fear in me as soon as the words were uttered. As a practitioner with my background in Geese Theatre Company, I felt I had to find a way to bury that physical response and see this sexual predator role, like the role of heavy, as a “mask” – a behaviour that did not speak to the whole person of Lola (see Baim et al., 2002; Watson, 2009). But in doing this, I was also seeing Lola as an offender – a role in which I perhaps inadvertently cast all of the women as a habit from my previous rehabilitation-focused work in a prison context. G. White’s (2015) recent work on the aesthetics of applied theatre encourages practitioners to view themselves and the participants as artists (p. 12). It was only as the program evolved that I began to recognise the need to view the participants this way rather than as offenders, and this had a significant impact on how I continued the work, and have since analysed it through an aesthetic frame. I also must consider what happened to my fear after I tried to bury it. I have no doubt that it remained somewhere in my body and therefore affected my responses to her, and consequently our relationship. Already Lola’s chances
for personal renewal in our space were being compromised by the roles in which she had been cast by others, and perhaps in some cases cast herself, as offender, heavy and sexual predator. And the opportunity for cultural renewal, in which a different non-adversarial narrative might exist inside BWCC, was similarly being eroded. Habitual roles and narratives were therefore bringing significant weight to bear on the self-world rhythm – the art of participation – in Living Stories.

My goals for the second session were to capitalise on the apparent energy and enthusiasm of the group, engage in further group building, introduce the idea of improvisation through games such as Knock at the Door and dialogues in pairs, and further explore the women's attitudes and life experiences through the game Equidistance/Bombs and Shields (R 2). This last exercise I had learned from Geese, and in the context of offending behaviour focused workshops, it always served well as an early exercise to energise the group and promote discussion about the real life issues that they faced (see Baim et al., 2002, p. 76). While the focus of Living Stories was not on offending behaviour, I felt that this last exercise would help to generate more broad discussion and begin to identify some of the interests and concerns of the group; but more of this later. Because of the sexual references and underlying sense of danger I had felt in Session 1, I had also resolved to introduce Session 2 with the co-creation of a contract of guidelines for the program, agreed upon by the women and designed to create a sense of safety (J 1). The nature of the approaches that I introduced in Session 2 provided the potential for some spontaneity in games and brief image and improvisation exercises, and moved between the fictional and the factual frames where role and narrative were concerned. But they did not focus at length on creating fictional imaginative worlds, and there were no exercises that demanded sustained forms of aesthetic engagement beyond the spontaneity that existed in improvisation games. Another of my goals for the session had simply been to maintain a sense of "fun and laughter" (R 2).

Before introducing the group guidelines, I began with a reflection on the previous day. I gave a summary of my observations, that there was energy, enthusiasm and willingness to have a go. I commented that this was surprising to me for a first session, as people are usually more cautious. I then asked the women why they thought this had been the case:

Lola: Oh no, you've got the best actors in the jail.

Karen: We're all pretty comfortable
Lola: We're all pretty self-confident, we're willing to get up and have a go.

Gwen: Everyone knows each other.

... 

Lola: [Talks about drama being something different.] We have a structured day. We'd get breached for carrying on like that. If I was doing that in Res [the residential section], they'd call the dog squad and I'd be walking back with handcuffs on.

Tracy: It puts your head in a different place for the whole time.

Lola: We can be ourselves here I suppose because we're not getting scrutinised by officers for it. (S 2)

By suggesting that the group is made up of “the best actors in the jail” and then stating, “we can be ourselves,” Lola inadvertently introduced the paradox of self and role in drama that is one of the key elements of my exploration of the art of process within the program. I wonder what it meant for Lola to “be herself” without the scrutiny of the officers – whether it meant that she felt the freedom to exercise her role as heavy or sexual predator; or whether she was able to let go of these to some extent and explore something different. Her dominating and over-sexualised behaviour during the first workshop might indicate the former; but there may also have been times when she felt able to let this role slip within the context of the group-building games and exercises that we did – but of this I can not be sure. Throughout our reflection, and during Session 2 as a whole, Lola’s was the strongest, loudest and most dominant voice. When she said, “We are all pretty self-confident,” it seemed clear to me that she was actually referring to herself. Her description of being breached brought a somatically powerful image to my mind, where I pictured her with her head held high, defiantly mouthing off at the officers who held her. I imagined it as a performance that she enjoyed, one that she participated in fairly regularly, and one that would certainly enhance her role as heavy. For Lola, the process of self-creation in the actual frame may have been anchored to this role, and therefore would become an integral part of how she performed versions of herself in the artistic frame of the drama.

At the end of the reflection, I asked whether there were any observations about the session that people wanted to add. Lola commented, “I think it was good to see people problem-solving. We actually used our brains for good; it was good to be able to say ‘I’ve got this task’ and get on with it. I liked using my brain” (S 2). This statement is charged with possibilities. On the one hand, Lola may have been playing the game in the most consummate fashion. In the same session I had also seen the cynicism with which she regarded the mainstream offender programs (S 2), and she may now have been
deliberately making out that drama was different, and that it had opened up a portal of goodness in her. On the other hand, there is a possibility that she was genuinely grateful for the opportunity to use her brain for something other than the manoeuvring and machinations necessary to maintain her status and power – her role – within the jail; or to simply use her brain in an inventive, spontaneous way. Either way, it marks a turning point in the sequence of events in Session 2. At this point, Lola was, for whatever reason, on board. As a practitioner, this was an opportunity for me to capitalise on this, and keep her there. But I still had the residual feelings of her role as a sexual predator churning away in the pit of my stomach, and a sense that I needed to create more safety in the space for myself, and possibly the other women.

The Game Begins

After our reflection, I started introducing the guidelines and this process seemed to erode the sense of freedom that Lola and her friends had felt in the first session. I facilitated what I thought was a collaborative conversation with the group about our agreed guidelines, with many of the women participating and contributing ideas for respect, sharing and commitment. I foolishly had begun listing the words on a piece of flipchart paper and Lola soon proclaimed, “Just seeing that bit of paper there – if you’re going to write on there, that makes me want to break all the rules straight away. If you make the rules, I’m definitely going to break them.” Both Karen and Lola went on to say that it was just like being in the other programs. I see now that this was a clumsy attempt on my part to work within the rhythm between freedom and constraint that C. Johnston (1998) describes as one of the key polarities that applied theatre practitioners must successfully negotiate (pp. 24-28). I could have framed the discussion around my research observations from the previous day and asked the group their opinions about the over-sexualised behaviour that I had seen, but this felt like a more risky proposition. Despite my attempt to undertake this process collaboratively as a set of shared expectations or guidelines, it failed. Lola saw rules written down on a piece of paper, which I would suggest completely changed our relationship, put me into role as an authority figure in the adversarial narrative of the jail, and thus moved her into a stance of defiance and rebellion - from what I had gleaned so far, a potentially habitual position for her. I set aside the paper and tried to have a more generalised conversation about our expectations, but Lola and Karen, along with Patti, were all very dismissive, rolling their eyes and impatiently rattling off the guidelines from their other programs. We now seemed to be on different sides in the game. I was trying to take away their freedom, and doing it in a way that was reminiscent of the much-hated criminogenic
programs. When I suggested that we take some responsibility for the content and not over sexualise things, Karen protested, “Why should we have to do that? If we can’t say certain things, then we don’t have any freedom in here – we can’t express ourselves” (J 2). We now seemed to be back at school. Rules were being written, a surly teenage kind of rebellion was brewing, and Karen was trying to outmanoeuvre the “teacher” by issuing a challenge that was difficult to fault. Her statement brought back the question of which “selves” these women wished to express: Whether it was the more unguarded spontaneous versions of self that sometimes emerged in play and improvisation, or the habitual roles of intimidation, rebellion and subversive sexualisation. If it were the latter, this might then diminish the freedom for other women in the group to express themselves. I could not argue with the general principle of what Karen was saying, but I did suggest that we needed to be mindful of what felt safe and comfortable for the group as a whole. I recall her being unconvinced by this argument.

The erosion of my relationship with the Big Three then continued through the next exercise, Equidistance/Bombs and Shields. In this exercise, I asked the group to move around and position themselves first equally distant from each other, and then to position themselves behind a person who would represent their shield, so that they were safe from another person who would represent their bomb. Despite my intentions for the game to open up discussion, it appeared to move us too far towards personal narrative for these particular women; and on the back of the written guidelines, may have seemed similarly moralistic and preachy. After playing the game, I asked the group to make connections to real life. Initially, the conversation flowed quite well:

Sarah: As women in this centre, or women anywhere – what are the things we have to keep in balance?

Emma: Everything. If everything’s not in balance then you live life as a rollercoaster – like you’re really high or you’re really low.

Lola: But in saying that, you can’t have the good times without the bad.

Unknown: It’s a balance.

Gwen: Yeah, it’s a balance.

Emma: Yeah, but rather than riding a rollercoaster, you can have equilibrium, or try to.

[Karen and Lola have a discussion about how this would be unappealing.]

Karen: Then you’re a robot.

Lola: I like the constant euphoria.

Sarah: Is that possible?

Lola: Yeah!
Sarah: Are you euphoric right now?

Lola: No.

Diane: See you can't have the good without the bad, that's what I'm saying.

(S 2)

This was an ill-advised direct challenge to Lola on my part. In this interaction, I was reverting to my Geese group work techniques (see Baim et al., 2002; Watson, 2009), but at the wrong time, in the wrong program and for the wrong reasons. Again, I was seeing Lola as an offender whose views needed to be challenged. Normally, I would only issue this kind of challenge after several sessions of explicit work on a prisoner's behaviour, and then follow it up with further exploration. But as much as it pains me to relive this moment of unskilled, unethical practice, I must recognise that I was building a survival role of my own against Lola, and I remember thinking *get ya!* — like a smug teacher. I was now playing the game: I felt I had out manoeuvred her and I had Diane to back me up. According to Landy (1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994), these roles and behaviours might have been serving a particular function for both of us, in my case as an attempt to mask my fears of her personally, and of losing control of the situation. In both cases, I would suggest we were in familiar, habitual territory, where the scope for any kind of expansion or renewal had all but closed down.

Following on from the passage above, an interesting discussion about relationships being "bombs" began with some of the other women, during which time Karen started talking with Lola in the background.

Sarah: Karen, you've got something going on over there? You're talking about something, is it to do with this?

Karen: Yeah.

Lola: Yeah.

Sarah: Do you want to share it?

Lola: Share it.

Karen: Oh god.

Gwen: You don't have to.

Karen: How is this drama? We're sort of going down a little path of being, I don't know, analysed and...yeah.

Sarah: Okay, I thought that might be what was going on for you over there.

Karen: It sounds a bit like substance abuse or relapse prevention where it's...the bomb's obviously the drugs and you can't go there...

Lola: My bomb was not drugs.

Karen: No, but that is what I can see in this game.
Lola: Yeah, you can see the pattern forming.
Sarah: For me this is an interesting game, where we can talk about it in relation to life, and so for everybody, bombs are different and there's no moral to the story, it's just getting an idea about what's out there in terms of themes. But if you think it's going too far into a...
Karen: I just thought we were here for drama.
Diane: But drama is about life isn't it?
Rachel: Yeah, you're just associating that with drugs and stuff.
Lola: No, because this is just like every other core program we've ever done.
Karen: Yeah.
Rachel: Oh, I've never done any programs. (S 2)

When I asked Karen to share what she was discussing with Lola, it reads like I was still in the schoolroom, addressing naughty children who are talking in the background. I intended my tone to be curious and inclusive, but it is possible that Karen and Lola did not hear this. Essentially, I could feel what was happening, and I wanted to address it head on – to try to problem solve the tension as a group and reassure them that I was not there to “analyse” them. Karen’s question, “How is this drama?” indicates that she had a specific set of expectations for the drama program that were not being met. It may have been that Karen was expecting us to work more within the fictional frame of role-play than in the factual frame of life experiences. Indeed, as I have mentioned in Chapter 4, Karen had said she was attracted to how the drama might enable her to be somebody else and have an “alter ego” (R 1). The personal turn of the discussion, alongside my previous challenge to Lola, may have also contributed to Karen feeling threatened. A bomb as a metaphor in this context invariably gives rise to incendiary themes, and at this moment Karen potentially felt that she was about to get burned. To Karen and Lola, the workshop was also becoming like “every other core program we’ve ever done,” and in doing so, was becoming a part of the narrative in which the women were controlled and manipulated in a Big Brother style experiment. Lola’s statement that she could, “see the pattern forming,” is particularly potent. I wonder if, as I could, she could feel the pattern forming as well – the familiar narrative and familiar roles within that narrative being driven by familiar feelings of paranoia, mistrust, anger and fear held within the soma. The pattern was therefore stuck in habit, with limited opportunity for spontaneous innovation and thus renewal, and this was due in no small part to my focus on factual life experiences. The reason that I gave the women for using the game was honest. I knew that the structure of the game and its debriefing was useful
in accessing personal material in a generalised way (Baim et al., 2002, p. 76), and I honestly thought that it might throw up interesting themes for us to pursue in terms of the kinds of experiences that in general terms informed the women's life stories. But in Geese we would have used this exercise with the participants knowing that they were there to address their own lives and choices. Given that my goals for the session had been to keep things light and fun, to capitalise on the energy and enthusiasm of the group and to introduce improvisation, a more effective exercise to include here would have been a game that harnessed the imaginative powers of the women, and began to direct them through spontaneity into a fictional context. This would have emphasised the art in the art of process and possibly allayed some of the hostile feelings that Lola and Karen were experiencing.

Some more discussion followed the interaction with Karen and Lola above, after which I tried to change the pace with a game of Liar, in which a participant in the centre of the circle mimes an activity, and a second participant enters the circle and asks, “What are you doing?” The first participant then lies, saying that they are doing something different, which the second participant must now enact as the first leaves the circle – and so it goes on. First, someone instructed Tracy that she was “having sex,” a flagrant flouting of the “rules” that we had discussed earlier. Then when I came into the circle after Lola, she gave me a very cold hard stare in the eyes as she walked slowly out and said, “I'm having a shot.” This seemed to mark a decision point for Lola. Rather than expressing her rebellion as a defiant teenager, she now appeared to be moving into a more aggressive role as heavy. It felt as if she had seen “the pattern” forming, I had challenged her in front of the group and now she was going to push back. I gave her strong eye contact back, and said, “A shot of what?” Lola held my gaze and said slowly, “Heroin. No, Speed.” I remember pausing briefly to think about whether I should indulge her challenge and do the mime. If I had, it would have played directly into the adversarial game that had been set up between us, to the exclusion of the rest of the group. Behind me, Gwen perhaps knowingly rescued me by suggesting I have a shot of alcohol. I said, “I think I will go with the alcohol.” This moment almost felt ritualistic. The group was in a circle, the two of us were staring each other down as we exchanged places. It felt almost like a schoolyard or prison fight being enacted in symbolic form. Recalling it now, I hear the theme from a spaghetti Western playing in the background, lending the scene a sense of absurdity. As I mimed the shot, I heard Lola say under her breath to the person next to her, “She doesn't do drugs,” or something to that effect (J2). Perhaps in other words, “She is not one of us.” At the time I felt deeply grateful to
Gwen, whose suggestion allowed me to essentially wiggle sideways out of Lola’s test without breaking the rhythm of the game or having to re-state the “rules” of the workshop space. In this moment, it seemed as if Gwen was taking a diplomatic stance, coming up with a compromise that might just suit both of the antagonists in the game. This moment represented the most obvious integration between playing the adversarial prison game within the structure of the playful drama game.

The next exercise, Postcards, was also difficult. In this exercise, participants are invited to contribute one-by-one to a collective image of a particular postcard scene, for example a haunted house, or a beach, or Paris:

This is when Lola, Tracy and Karen really sank back, and started being resistant to the process. They sat in their chairs and didn’t participate much. They projected an energy of resistance and slight aggression. In the beginning, they did participate in the beach scene, but Lola became a beach towel, and Karen lay on top of her. (J 2)

Having been told about Lola’s behaviour as a sexual predator, this action was a red flag for me. I can still see the physicality of the image now, the two women laughing and wriggling on top of each other. Where on the previous day I may have thought it inappropriate but playful, in now became threatening, and I felt it in my gut. Again, Lola and Karen appeared to be trying to subvert our group guidelines within the structure of the drama exercise: playing the jail game within the drama game. We then came to the improvisation game Knock at the Door in which one participant stands inside their “house” and the other must come up with a character, and a compelling reason to be allowed inside without using force – they must talk their way in:

Everyone did really well, but once it got to Lola, she mimed kicking in the door and pointing a gun at the person inside. I reminded her that she couldn’t use force. ‘I’m not!’ She said firmly,

‘You are,’ I said trying to laugh and keep it light – ‘You’re kicking the door in!’

She then said, ‘Ok.’ And instead pointed the ‘gun’ at the person in the house and said, ‘Bang! Bang! Let me in!’

I said, ‘That’s force too. Try and talk your way in.’

At that point, she gave up: ‘I don’t like this game. I’m not doing it.’ And she walked back to her chair, finally saying, ‘I’m not a good talker.’ A few other group members laughed at this, and someone said, ‘Yes you are! You’re a great talker!’ But she continued to refuse to do it. . . . When we got to Tracy, she refused, and then Karen refused. (J 2)
After this, all of the Big Three left the room one-by-one and did not return to the session. This would appear to be the final nail in the coffin of my relationship with Lola. It is possible that Lola did not understand that when I said she could not use force, I meant imaginary force as well as real force. It may also have been that Lola was using her usual tactic of trying to break, bend and subvert the rules of the game, and performing the most extreme version of her role as heavy in order to succeed. On the other hand, she may have been feeling exposed and vulnerable in this moment of risk, reverting to a habitual behaviour in order to deal with the improvised situation. I have no idea in this situation whether Lola was assuming a fictional role, or whether she was acting as herself – she did not announce herself as others had, for example, “I am a police officer,” or “I am a gas technician and I need to come inside.” What she did certainly appeared to have strong physical and emotional qualities – an enactment that was somatically charged with anger and aggression, and a response to my criticism that demonstrated intense frustration. Looking back now, I wonder if it would have been more helpful if I had suggested that Lola come up with a clear fictional character and then discuss what that character would say in order to gain entry. Drawing on the emotional aspect of the art of process as described in Chapter 2, I wonder if Lola had been in a fictional role, whether it is possible that she may have been able to represent emotion in a safer, more protected way as described by G. M. Bolton (1984, pp. 105-139), rather appearing to engage in what Dewey (1934, p. 162) describes as discharging her own negative emotions in response to the unfolding situation. In this sense, the emotion of the moment might have been transfigured through the aesthetic process. In terms of Dewey’s integrative rhythm between doing and undergoing that underpins aesthetic experience, Lola appeared to be undergoing a great deal of emotion as she was “doing” the enactment of this scene, but within this process, there was again little art.

In the case of a drama game, the rhythm between structure or rules and spontaneity or freedom creates the conditions for success in the form of humour, creativity, imagination and innovation as I have explored within the art of process in Chapter 2 (see Dewey, 1934; Fesmire, 2003; Granger, 2001, 2010; Johnstone, 1999, 2007; Nohl, 2009; O’Neill, 1995; Sawyer, 2000; Shusterman, 2000a, 2009a, 2011a; Taylor & Warner, 2006). I have established previously that this rhythm between habit and innovation forms the basis for a poetics of self-creation as conceived by Granger (2001, 2006, 2010) and the somaesthetic movement towards personal and cultural renewal as proposed by Shusterman (2000a, 2006b, 2008b, 2011a, 2011b, 2012). I have also drawn on Fesmire, and Johnstone (1999) in seeing the potential in improvisation as a model
for ethical participation and renewal. By following the rules, some of the other women had succeeded in making each other laugh, collaborating ethically and maintaining the imaginative and narrative flow of the game. Lola’s habitual role as a heavy in this instance seemed to bring this flow to a jarring halt and stifled the potential for innovation. She may instinctively have known this, and if she did, it is likely she would have felt even more exposed and isolated — not one of us. This, in turn, would sabotage her sense of self and therefore her willingness to participate. It was important to me for Lola to honour the rules of the game, because I felt a strong sense of unease about how her aggressive enactment might be affecting Grace who was inside the imaginary house, and how it might undermine the spirit of the game. Although I was trying to be light in the way that I challenged her, I doubt she would have heard this, she would possibly have only heard, “You must follow the rules, you have got it wrong.” This may have been something that she had heard many times before, and been incorporated into her self-narrative. I even noted in my journal my reluctance to get up and stand beside her and offer her alternative suggestions to get into the house, as I would in other situations with other participants. I was tired, and tired of her (J 2), and in response to this, she gave up with the classic childhood refrain of “I don’t like this game. I’m not doing it.” This incident again raises questions about the roles and relationships that we were both enacting through the course of the session. For the third and final time, I had challenged her in front of the group and been supported by one or more other group members. Her high status was being progressively undermined and her vulnerability exposed. Despite my awareness that I should change the dynamic, I was also aware that I wanted to take away her intimidating power. Lola was indeed a very good talker. I doubt very much that she would genuinely have struggled to find a different way into the house in this game, had she not been locked into her role as rebellious heavy, and I had not been locked into trying to undermine this role. I am also very curious about why the other two women in the Big Three refused to take part; whether they were also feeling vulnerable and exposed, were being loyal to Lola, or feeling that they would not have permission to succeed where Lola had failed.

At the end of the session described above, I felt out of my depth, like I had failed in some measure, and I was seriously questioning my abilities and approach. I also felt as if I did not care whether or not the Big Three came back to the program (J 2). In other words, “I don’t like this game. I’m not doing it.” By the following week I was more open to the possibility that Lola might come back, but I employed a familiar and adversarial strategy to deal with her:
Armed with all of this information... about her being a 'sexual predator', about her being a 'heavy', and with all my previous experience of her, I felt myself build a psychological armour of my own. I was ready for anything, and ready to stand my ground no matter what. I greeted her directly and made direct eye contact, which she didn't return. (J 3)

The language in this journal suggests that I was still locked in a Lola versus Sarah battle. It is interesting the importance I placed on eye contact in this and my previous journal entry about our interaction in the game Liar (J 2). At the time when Lola did not return my eye contact, I felt a small petty sense of victory. I did not know why she was suddenly unable to meet my eye where previously she had been so forthright and aggressive. It is possible she felt less powerful without Tracy and Karen in the room, or equally she may have lost any little respect for me that she had due to our previous encounters. On the other hand, she may have been experiencing a feeling of paranoia as a result of her aforementioned drug psychosis, or she may have been reluctant to allow me to really see her, or to keep seeing her in the same light as I had in the previous week. Throughout Session 2, it seems that both of us were using our roles within the meta-narrative of the adversarial game in an effort to avoid feeling unsafe, vulnerable and lacking mastery of the situation in the drama workshop space. And at times we used the drama games to manoeuvre our way around each other in pursuit of these goals. At the beginning of Session 3, Lola waited a few minutes for her friends to arrive but they were taking too long and she became impatient. When she decided to leave, I noted in my journal that I was not going to beg her to stay (J 3) – still locked into a misguided power struggle. She left the session and never returned to the program. Karen persevered for a few more sessions, seeming to become involved and enjoy the workshops more once we moved into new and fictional territory. After this session, I had another meeting with Nancy in which she suggested that Lola, "may have been trying to 'stack' the group with friends and allies so that they could manipulate me and/or the situation". She went on to say, "You must have won because she left early – she obviously wasn't getting what she wanted" (J 3). Even Nancy saw dealing with Lola as a battle or a game. I must have won, but despite a certain amount of relief that Lola quit, deep down I later felt like I had lost. In my journal at the time, I justified the whole situation by suggesting that Lola was not ready to be part of the drama group (J 3), but clearly neither was I ready to find productive ways to include her.

I feel it is worth considering the other women in this case. Descriptions of their participation in my journals and reflections are extremely positive, but minimal through
the first two sessions. The dynamic between the Big Three and I overtook my perception and narration of the experience in the same way that it threatened to overtake the process itself. Yet there is evidence to suggest that the other women in the room were trying to resist this, and were quietly determined to explore other possibilities. Diane, Gwen and Emma were willing and open participants in the discussion that followed Equidistance/Bombs and Shields, and they did not appear afraid to challenge Lola's beliefs. Gwen's imaginative offering to me in Liar of a shot of alcohol appeared to be a conscious effort to bring about a compromise in our stand off. Indeed, when Tracy and Karen left the session early, there was a ripple of quiet discussion after which Diane said, "Let's not talk about that, this is the group now, so let's get on with it" (J 2). My journal entry suggests that the women had "doggedly continued" to persevere with the process, willing to learn, participate and take risks despite what I then called "sabotage" from the Big Three (J 2). Like Lola, after the first workshop these women had identified the potential for drama to offer new ways of thinking and being as I have described in Chapter 4. While I have already suggested that they may themselves have been playing the game in offering these positive responses, I do not believe they were being so cynical. Perhaps the ways in which they articulated the outcomes were at times calculated to sound "rehabilitative", but in the spontaneous reactions and responses of the workshop exercises, there appeared to be genuine abandon and engagement. The tension between the Big Three and me was obstructing this flow, and the other women seemed determined to overcome the obstruction and continue onwards and upwards. I wonder now whether this determined energy of the rest of the group contributed to pushing Lola and her friends out that day.

**Engagement and Renewal in the Game**

In his theory of somaesthetics, Shusterman (2006b) acknowledges the deep co-dependence between body, mind and culture and recognises, "The body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation . . . and creative self-fashioning" (p. 2). Granger (2006) cites Shusterman (2000) and Foucault (n.d.) in describing Dewey's embodied view of experience and its relationship to culture: "Culture, with its complex of symbol systems, ideals, values, beliefs, and customs has its roots in the lived body" (p. 221). He goes on to explore how physical environments such as schools and places of work often isolate the mind "and train it as one would a muscle" (p. 224). I would suggest that most prisons, including BWCC, engage in this isolation of mind in their efforts to rehabilitate individuals, another feature of the environment that might contribute to a sense of somatic binding. The women's responses to the drama program as encouraging them to
“think differently” as described in the previous chapter may hint at this tendency to
isolate mind. Only Emma, Gwen and Mandy described and demonstrated a more
embodied version of renewal later in the program. The women’s perceptions of the
“ridiculous game” of criminogenic programs was similarly characterised by the
disembodied act of “text book learning”; as was the description that Helen, the
Education Officer gave about the Vocational and Educational Training programs:
“There is an element of active learning but, I’m sorry, it’s more box-ticking, it’s more
passive learning” (Helen, SI 2). In this rendering, the “ridiculous game” of rehabilitation
is played by ticking a box, turning a page and telling “teacher” what she wants to hear.
As I began to explore guidelines with the group, some of the women immediately
started to roll their eyes, fold their arms, slouch back in their chairs and disengage. Their
bodies responded to the familiarity of the game, closing down and closing off; the
bound-up “brick wall” mask (Baim et al., 2002, pp. 184-185; Watson, 2009, p. 53) had
begun to build; and this came as a stark contrast to the freer, more embodied
experiences of play that we had experienced on the previous day. The nature of
aesthetic experience as an integration of thought and feeling, cognition and emotion, or
feeling and reason explored elsewhere in this work is reflected in the crucial relationship
between embodied action and critical reflection in applied theatre to facilitate learning
and transformation. Through my choices of activities, and subsequent facilitation of
them, I was clearly struggling to elegantly conduct this rhythm, and the song was
suffering.

As I have described elsewhere, a significant element of our embodied interaction
with the environment, of doing and undergoing in experience (Dewey, 1934) – the art
of process - is role. Role, like narrative, informs and forms the kinds of personal and
cultural renewal that are possible in aesthetic experience in both the actual and artistic
frames. Similarly, role can be seen as the object of creation in aesthetic experience; in
both dramatic and non-dramatic enactment of role, there is the potential for aesthetic
engagement, where the act of performing a role possesses the dynamic, meaningful and
consummatory qualities of an experience. Landy’s (1990) system of interdependent roles
suggests that there are differences between the roles that are biological, those that we
“take” as a result of social interaction, and those that we actively “play” (pp. 100-101).
In this sense the taking and playing of a role is an inherently aesthetic act, an embodied
form of “self-creation” (Granger, 2001) or “creative self-fashioning” (Shusterman,
2000c, 2006b, 2008b, 2009a, 2011a, 2011b, 2012) that is dependent upon interaction
with others and the world. I would add that it is possible that others might bestow roles
upon us that influence the flow experience, as in the role of offender that initially informed my approach, or the role of sexual predator in which Lola was cast first by Nancy and Helen, and then by me in the narrative of our interaction. Throughout this critical incident, there are clear examples of role being bestowed, taken and played by Lola and me in ways that limited our scope for personal and cultural renewal. In Landy's (1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994) view, roles such as heavy and smug teacher might be seen to serve a particular protective function for Lola and me as we tried to negotiate and create our familiar yet new environment, and our relationships within that environment. What is more, these roles were intensified in their embodiment. Lola's physical actions of kicking the imaginary door down or climbing on top of Karen on the imaginary beach were not based in talk, they were based in embodied action. Indeed, Lola rejected the idea of talk in her response to Knock at the Door in favour of an embodied enactment of her aggression. In these moments Lola demonstrated a somatic commitment that strengthened her roles, heightened the level of risk involved and potentially deepened her emotional investment in the adversarial game. On the other side of the same coin, my somatically held fear of Lola's role as heavy and sexual predator precipitated reactions and roles in me. This may have provoked an embodied emotional response to the environment that we were co-creating which then informed the physical choices that she made, and thus the roles that she played. This appears again as a rhythm, a somatic interaction between doing and undergoing that in this case did not necessarily result in renewal. In a sense, it could be seen as process without the art.

Following Bundy's (2003a, 2003b) view of aesthetic engagement, it might be assumed that when there is presence, risk, emotion, spontaneity and flow in the playing of a fictional role, then it might be infused with the qualities of an aesthetic experience. Yet while the difficult moments between Lola and I appear to have possessed these qualities at different times as we surrendered ourselves to the adversarial game of jail, I wonder whether they can be classified in the same way. For me certainly the experience of that second session can now be perceived in Dewey's (1934) aesthetic terms as an experience: it possesses a “pervasive quality” (Alexander, 1998, p. 15) that marks it out from other experiences, and it is storied here with an inherent narrative structure and dynamic flow. Certainly also, there was a sense of somatic engagement for me in some of these interactions and the roles I adopted – the sense of ritual that characterised the stand-off between Lola and I in the game of Liar was powerful. I felt something in that moment that transcended my initial affective responses to Lola, perhaps because the
moment was taking on a more performative, objective dimension. This may have been an example of "native emotion" (Dewey, p. 79) being given structure by the symbolic form of the game. As such, it would qualify as an aesthetic experience. On the other hand, in fictional role taking, there exists the paradoxical nature of metaxis (Allern, 2001; Boal, 1995; G. M. Bolton, 1984; Bundy, 2003a; Cahill, 2010; Jackson & Leahy, 2005; Linds, 2006; O'Conno, 2009; O'Neill, 1995; O'Toole, 1992; Perry, 2012), or "being me but not me" (Landy, 2001, pp. 214-215) that is crucial to aesthetic engagement in drama. There was little opportunity for this to occur in the first two sessions of Living Stories, where I did not introduce any exercises that would allow the women to explore role in any significant way beyond the briefest of moments in Knock at the Door and the "Life is Good" images. In this session, I was therefore encouraging performances of self, rather than performances of fictional roles; and a question then emerged about which selves the women were enjoying the freedom to express, and which selves I was presenting in response.

I have explored elsewhere that the potential for personal and cultural renewal in Living Stories was dependent upon the narratives that we created, recreated and reinforced in response to our experience, which in turn informed how our experiences unfolded. In exploring role, we explore the narratives within which those roles are enacted. For Landy (1991), story is the "verbal or gestural text . . . that expresses the role" (p. 223). Just as roles can become habitual, so too can narratives that express and contain them, becoming as Bruner (2004) suggests, "recipes for structuring experience itself" (p. 708). It has been discussed that applied theatre is concerned with finding new (and perhaps more tasty) recipes for structuring experience. Yet this critical incident demonstrates just how entrenched narratives can interact with entrenched roles to thwart personal and cultural renewal. The adversarial culture of the jail was articulated early on for me by a simple line down a whiteboard. This was then perpetuated in the ways that the women storied their environment as "Big Brother" and a "ridiculous game." This narrative was familiar, and roles that were driving the story were familiar as well. I knew that Living Stories had to somehow re-write our experience of the environment so that there was possibility for renewal, but we got off to a very faltering start. This critical incident also raised questions for me about how to deal with personal narrative in a new context, and how to manage the delicate rhythms between the fictional and the actual frames in addressing the women's personal experiences. Exploring personal experience in a generalised way during Equidistance/Bombs and Shields was a clumsy move on my part, which seemed to reinforce the idea for Karen
that she was being “analysed.” Other women such as Diane, Gwen and Emma seemed open to the possibility that their stories might inform our drama process, but as I have discussed in the previous chapter, this became problematic for them as well.

The discussion about the rollercoaster of life, and Lola and Karen’s suggestion that a life of equilibrium would be boring, highlighted another key question: whether or not the dynamic form of an experience (or narrative) is potentially more engaging if it contains movement between extremes. From an aesthetic perspective, extremes of emotion and tension are necessary to make life narratives, and indeed fictional narratives, more compelling than those which follow a flat line. Barba (2004), Bruner (1990, 1991b), Dewey (1934), Kermode (1981), Ricoeur (1984), Turner (1981) and others recognise in different ways that the rhythm between disturbance and harmony is a key feature of high quality experience and narrative. Barba’s vivid description of the creative process as “a deep order called turbulence” points towards the tension of extremes, as does le Guin’s metaphor of the narrative as a wild beast (1981). My own attraction to blues and country music is also emblematic of this bipolarity, the greatest of beauty being found along side the deepest of suffering. I believe that this points toward the kind of “perverse beauty” that Bharucha referred to in his address to the Theatre Applications conference (as cited in Mackey & Stuart Fisher, 2011), pointing towards the possibility that applied theatre should embrace something more complex than a one-dimensional aesthetic of injury and victimhood on the one hand (see Balfour, 2009; E. Cox, 2008; Jeffers, 2008; Salverson, 2009; Thompson, 2009b); or inclusive harmony and acceptance on the other. The narratives of Living Stories were fraught with the tensions of extremes, which may be one of the things that attracts me as an artist to the prison environment in the first place. My story of this session, the story of running this program, and the stories of the women who took part, are characterised by the unyielding rhythm between disturbance and harmony; and I must consider Dewey’s (1934) proposal the moment of passage between these two states is key to aesthetic experience – it is the “moment of intensest life” (p. 17).

Conclusion

One of the conditions for aesthetic experience and innovation is a sense of risk, but with habit acting as a kind of touchstone to help gauge the risk, and anchor the movement into new horizons. In the artistic context of an applied theatre process, aesthetic experience is similarly nurtured in the rhythmic interaction between the structures of narrative, the rules of the game and so on, and the freedom to be
spontaneous within, around and outside of those structures. In an ideal Deweyan sense, this rhythm leads towards productive new roles, relationships, narratives and meanings – towards new forms of knowing – that lead to personal and cultural renewal. The environment of the workshop space was likely both familiar and new to us all. The space may have been familiar in the sense that it was a well-used classroom within the jail, possibly reminiscent of other classrooms that these women had experienced when they had been at school: A space that may traditionally have held strong emotional memories, habitual roles and narratives and the pervasive idea that the mind is isolated from the body. Yet the things that were happening in this space might have contained a mix of the familiar and the new – games, spontaneity, loud voices and physical touch and somatic engagement all reminiscent of childhood play, yet new in terms of them being encouraged and celebrated in adulthood, and particularly in the restrictive context of the jail. For me, it was familiar in the sense that I had been inside many prisons and worked with many men and women; but new in terms of being in Australia, and finding my own way within the practice. We were now required to find new ways to interact with this environment, wherein there might be potential for the vital rhythm to be established between habitual behaviours and roles from the actual frame, and innovative responses within the artistic frame of the drama.

In the first session, it seems that Lola had felt the freedom to think a little differently through games and improvisation, but she and her friends also saw the freedom to exercise their power in very physical, playful, yet still intimidating ways. As I began to explore personal experience through the exercise Equidistance/Bombs and Shields, and I openly challenged Lola on her quest for constant euphoria, the workshop became reminiscent of the programs that they deplored and the three women began to disengage. At this point, Lola moved towards the more openly aggressive end of her heavy role. In this series of interactions, we potentially set up the same adversarial game, and the roles within that game that Lola and her friends were familiar with elsewhere in the jail, and possibly in their lives outside. Similarly, I reverted to roles and behaviours that perpetuated this dynamic. These roles and relationships served the function of protecting each of us in our respective corners from physical and emotional threats such as violence, failure, vulnerability and loss of control. Here the actual frame of the adversarial jail game interacted with the artistic frame of the games that we were playing in the drama space, and my mismanagement of this rhythm rendered the space unsafe and in many ways unproductive. These events exemplify my early confusion about the purpose and approaches I would use in my work in a prison context, in particular how I
would negotiate the rhythms between safety and freedom; and how to approach personal narrative more gently and creatively. The activities that I introduced encouraged the performance and storying of self – of attitudes, aspirations, life’s “bombs and shields” – rather than operating in the fictional or imaginative realm. This did not therefore provide the sense of freedom and escape that was glimpsed by the participants in certain other games that we played. For Lola and Karen, I offered few opportunities to become somebody else or to have an alter ego through role, as I placed demands upon them to share their real-life opinions and attitudes, and in some cases challenged them on these. There was little chance for either personal or cultural renewal within the episode I have described here, and as a practitioner, it served as a potent reminder of how easy it can be to compromise the art of process by being drawn into the habitual roles and narratives of the adversarial jail game. This session was therefore a significant turning point for me in addressing how I managed the rhythms of Living Stories, and how I began to view these women as potential artists rather than offenders.
Chapter 6. I’ve Gotta Be Me: Gwen’s Story

Whether I’m right or whether I’m wrong,
Whether I find a place in this world or never belong,
I gotta be me, I’ve gotta be me,
What else can I be but what I am. (Marks, 1968)

Introduction

This chapter represents the second of my individual case stories through which I will conduct a closer analysis of the process in Living Stories. This story centres on Gwen, an older woman of 60 who joined the program at the beginning and remained with it until the end, only missing one or two sessions. She was slim, with permed grey hair, sharp features and alert blue eyes. She told me she had grown up and lived in a few different rural areas around the country, describing herself as “dinky-di Australian” (GI1), and she certainly looked the part. I could picture her in a pair of old jeans and a checked shirt, feeding dogs and drinking tea at the kitchen table. Gwen had only attended school to grade eight and had never done drama before. She said she had a long history of smoking cannabis and that this had affected her memory (GI1), but this did not seem to gel with the visual image of her. She was four years into a 10-year sentence, so the crime must have been serious. This also seemed at odds with her appearance, although there were certainly signs of worry, stress, guilt, regret and whatever else may bring shadows of torment to an older face. Like Mandy, she spoke with a broad Australian accent, nasal and sometimes harsh — but never loudly, and with an undertone of hesitation, even gentleness. And it was the rural white Australian accent whose inflections and colloquial language have not been coloured by American popular culture or urban affectations.

In the room, she was earnest and diligent. She followed instructions to the letter and seemed eager to please. Yet when it came to performance she hardly ever let herself go or became lost in the moment. She admitted to being agoraphobic (S2; II1; II2), and there always seemed to be an internal critic, cautioning her not to fail, not to make a fool of herself and not to lose control (see for example II2). Some of this may be attributed to the fact that she had been in a controlling and abusive relationship for much of her adult life, her former husband preventing her from even the most basic freedoms (II2). For Gwen, being in jail was an ironically liberating experience in which she was now free to pursue her interests and learn new skills. She was intelligent,
curious and at times quite opinionated. Despite her reticence in actual performance, she often took the lead in the creative process of improvisations and devising, coming up with imaginative solutions and ideas, directing other participants and responding to the exercises with focus and commitment. Her creative contributions were often coloured by an interest in historical research, and an attention to detail, which were highly evident once we began exploring Joan of Arc and the other historical figures. Gwen was polite and friendly to the other women in the group, but did not appear to be close to any of them except for Tina. Tina and Gwen were in the same residential unit, and Gwen took it upon herself to look after the younger woman in what appeared to be almost a mothering kind of role. Gwen was the librarian for the jail, and also edited and wrote much of the weekly magazine. She was a keen writer, having previously been involved in the creative writing group that was no longer running due to limited resources.

Gwen’s engagement with the program was interesting in that she seemed to be taking a very conscious decision to incorporate the drama into her own project of self-creation and personal renewal, as she navigated her way out of her former life and began exploring a range of creative and other pursuits in jail. Of each of the participants that I discuss in detail, Gwen was the most articulate about her experience, and appeared to be the most inclined towards creativity and artistic expression. In terms of my research, this meant that Gwen was the most accessible participant, giving very detailed responses in interviews and reflections. Perhaps due to her artistic sensibilities, she seemed aware of the notion of personal renewal as a creative process in itself, one that is enhanced through art-centred aesthetic experience. As a practitioner, it was quite easy for me to be engaged and carried along by this potentially transformational narrative of renewal, and I will therefore dig more deeply for the complexities and tensions within her story. Through Gwen’s story, I will explore how the notion of renewal can operate within the artistic and actual frames of applied theatre, specifically through narrative and role. In previous chapters, I have discussed the art of living as being underpinned by a pragmatic acknowledgement that experience (and aesthetic experience) is key to personal and cultural renewal. Where renewal has been described as a dialectical process of self-making and world-making through experience, Gwen’s story provides some interesting insights into how the self can be made and re-made as it is performed within the different frames of the applied theatre context. In Gwen’s case, there was a sense that Living Stories only began to scratch the surface of this self-making potential, and that this process could have been enhanced by providing her with opportunities for deeper somaesthetic engagement, a form of engagement that I have begun to

The Bound-Up Prison Person

Prior to coming to BWCC, Gwen had been imprisoned in her home for 28 years by her abusive former husband, who she said had eroded her self esteem and prevented her from associating with (and trusting) anyone but her own family (GI 3; II 2). For this reason, Gwen laughed and said that jail was the best thing that ever happened to her:

I like it, I'm allowed to work in the library, I'm allowed to do the magazine, I can do drama classes – I do the writing class and I'm doing the history of female jails in Australia. There are so many things that I'm allowed to do in here that I was never allowed to do before. And when I do get out... I have to learn how to make my way on my own being who I am, and all that stuff in here is teaching me how to do that with more confidence. The week before I came to jail, I would not have been able to sit down and talk to you like this, I just couldn't do it. (Gwen, II 2)

Gwen appeared to be experiencing an overall sense of personal renewal as a result of her removal from the restrictions of her former life, and it seems that Living Stories had the potential to be a significant part of this process for her. “Being who I am,” is a key phrase here, indicating that Gwen's sense of self in dealing with her new life and making her way was particularly important to her. In Session 2, I asked participants what they hoped to gain from the drama, which was when Gwen first spoke about her agoraphobia:

When you come to jail...you have to learn to control it... Now agoraphobia, people think it's a fear of being outside. No it's not, it actually feels like you're being watched all the time... I don't understand how people live their life and they don't have that feeling and they don't be aware of their body all the time and what their body's doing so they're not being silly or outrageous. I'm controlled, trying to be controlled all the time, and I don't understand how people live without having those feelings. So hopefully this will teach me that. This will teach me to relax. (S 2)

She later described how at the beginning of the drama program, she was prepared to be “told to leave” (II 2). She still retained this feeling during the final performance, “I kept feeling like I was doing the wrong thing” (S 23). The drama program therefore presented significant risks and potentials for Gwen. Whereas her writing and research
activities were quiet, individual, somewhat intellectual pursuits, she was now being invited into an embodied form of creativity that by definition must occur in connection with, and under the gaze of others.

Perhaps due to her facility with language, Gwen brought the particularly evocative image to my study of the bound-up prison person that I have described in previous chapters, which I have proposed may vary from person to person depending on their particular life experiences and learned survival strategies. Gwen’s original description of the bound-up prison person came through the following observation:

When they know they’re not being watched by an officer or nobody’s listening, they’re not under any scrutiny, people relax and the real person comes across instead of the bound-up prison person, you get a real person comes out, and that’s good. (Gwen, II 1)

When I asked Gwen to clarify what she meant by the bound-up prison person she explained,

That is the person who is careful what they say, they’re careful how they behave. You can get breached (snaps fingers) like that. You don’t even know you’ve done anything wrong, and the next thing you’re in trouble. One person tells you to do something and you do that, and another person will come around and breach you for it. Whereas in the drama class, as with a couple of the other classes here, there is nobody watching you except for the teacher or tutor or whatever, and so yeah, we can sort of relax and if you do accidentally say the wrong thing, nobody’s going to jump all over you. Or if you do accidentally do the wrong thing, everybody’s going to say ‘it’s okay, it’s an accident,’ you know? (Gwen, II 1)

This passage deals with the risk of being breached by the prison authorities for doing or saying the wrong thing, however, there also appear to be echoes of her previous domestically controlling and abusive relationship in her description, as well as her subsequent self-consciousness, paranoia and agoraphobia. Discussing Gwen’s involvement in the magazine and other activities in the centre, the Education Officer Helen observed:

Putting your head up in jail is not necessarily a positive thing because you can get it chopped off very quickly. So to be prepared to have put her head up, not only that, but then for drama, oh I think is really a major step for her. (SI 1)
The image of keeping your head down in prison for fear of having it chopped off has very strong somatic connotations. The body is bent, restricted in its movement, and there is no eye contact with others. The emotional quality of this image is cautious, even fearful. It is a common phrase in prison, and a clear manifestation of the physical and emotional binding that I have discussed in Chapter 4. I have suggested that this binding is reminiscent of Easteal's (2001) triad of negative coping behaviours, the Geese "brick wall" mask (Baim et al., 2002, pp. 184-185; Watson, 2009, p. 53); and the idea of "docile bodies" (Foucault) with minds that are isolated by institutionalisation (Granger, 2006, p. 224), and who are unable to have "active and alert commerce with the world" (Dewey, 1934, p. 19). It potentially keeps prisoners from risking self-disclosure, much less self-expression or demonstrable forms of renewal. Gwen’s experience of a long-term abusive relationship and the subsequent agoraphobia and social anxiety must therefore have worked in combination with the general culture of the jail to create this sense of being bound-up. Gwen’s statement about being constantly, "Aware of the body and what the body is doing," describes an embodied form of self-consciousness that would certainly have been exacerbated by her awareness of the surveillance and scrutiny inside BWCC. For Gwen to consciously try to release some of her binding, to "put her head up" and engage in activities such as the drama program therefore appeared to be no small thing.

Self-Creation, Role and Renewal

In the previous chapter, I referred to Granger’s (2006) interpretation of Dewey’s "consummatory experience", where the merging between self and world is seen as an Emersonian horizontal expansion in which the well-trodden pathways of individual and cultural habit are resurfaced and redirected. Role theory suggests that in the actual frame, human beings perform certain habitual roles in order to respond to their culture and environment (see Baim et al., 2002; Emunah, 1994; Landy, 1990, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 2001), echoing Dewey’s conception of habit as described by scholars such as Shusterman (2000a, 2009a, 2011a) and Granger (2001, 2010). In drama, there is potential to expand the role repertoire, or experiment with “possible selves” (O’Neill, 1995, p. 79) beyond habitual roles such as the bound-up prison person for example. Granger (2001, 2010), Nohl (2009) and Shusterman (2000a, 2009a, 2011a) draw on Dewey’s theory to suggest that renewal in all aesthetic experience arises from the integrative rhythm between habit and innovation, and this can be extended to the operation of role in the expansion of the self (see Heathcote, 1995 and Moreno, 1959 as cited in O’Neill, 1995, pp. 79-80). Gwen herself began to describe this horizontal image
of expansion, and the interaction between self and role, in her early reflections on Living Stories:

It gives us another horizon, it gives us another place to go, and by that I mean to try out our skills, to gain some confidence, you know, to stop thinking of ourselves as big horrible criminal type people and just being people. (Gwen, II 1)

Gwen also used the term “broadening” to describe this expansion of self, and she went on to say that she had also felt this in the writing class, where not only was it about learning skills, but having the freedom to express herself (II 1). When I asked the group what they wanted the audience to take away from our final performance, Gwen suggested, “Maybe that we’re not just criminal people sitting in jail, but we are capable of succeeding at other things. That it’s not just about the evil people that we are, which seems to be the public concept” (GI 1). During our devising for Inspiring Women from History, I asked her if she made any connections to Caroline Chisholm, the humanitarian figure of 19th century Australia who worked tirelessly for immigrant welfare and employment rights whom she had chosen to depict. “Oh yeah, I mean everybody would like to do that good I think, you know, even us wicked criminals would like to be as good as she was, you know? We don’t want to be horrible people”. She then went on to ask me, “Did you think because . . . we were (a) criminals or (b) prisoners or whatever, that we wouldn’t have the oompf, kind of thing, to do it?” (Gwen, GI 2) From these comments, a key to Gwen’s sense of renewal appeared to be the idea that she could see herself, or be seen by others, as something other than an evil or wicked criminal. In this sense, Gwen was engaged in an embodied process of exploring new roles, constructing new narratives of selfhood and performing versions of that selfhood to herself and others. This was an ethical and poetic undertaking that is crucial to my conception of applied theatre as an art of living as informed by Bruner (1990), Granger (2001, 2006, 2010), Heddon (2008), Nicholson (2005), Sarbin (1997) and Shusterman (2000b, 2008b, 2011b).

At the end of the program, when I asked the participants what research questions or areas of focus would interest them, Gwen wanted to find out whether the participants would have been interested in drama under different circumstances: “If you were not in prison, would you ever have considered doing a drama class?” (GI 3). After some discussion in which Emma and Mandy suggested they probably would not have tried drama outside, the conversation continued:
Gwen: No it’s not something that would fit into our lifestyles really would it? That was a different sort of people.

Mandy: Yeah, I would like to have but I wouldn’t have had the time.

Gwen: No. I wouldn’t have had the bravery and I wouldn’t have had the permission.

... 

Gwen: People who do theatre or drama or whatever . . . they dress differently, they speak differently, they have different interests, they have different lifestyles. You know, they’re just a different section of the community to the people that I’m used to. And probably that Mandy’s used to or any of the rest of us.

Sarah: What is the difference? Who are those people, and how are they different from your sector of the community?

Gwen: They’re usually artier, cleaner...

Mandy: They’re theatrical.

Emma: They’re more confident.

Mandy: They’re drama queens.

... 

Mandy: Divas.

Gwen: Yeah, bitches [laughs]. I don’t know, it’s just a different section...

... 

Gwen: See you’re the first person I’ve seen in theatre who dresses like I dress on the outside. They’ve all got big floral skirts and [does some la-di-da acting]...

Mandy: An ensemble.

Gwen: And I’m like, where’s the jeans? (GI 3)

In these passages, Gwen and the others explore an amusing stereotype of theatrical people that may have come from the usual representations in popular culture or been observed in the more traditional forms of amateur theatre in their local communities. Gwen had never before experienced applied theatre as we were undertaking in Living Stories, and was therefore relying on the stereotype to build her understanding of theatre and theatrical people. Gwen’s assertion that she would not have had the bravery or permission to do drama may refer to her domestically abusive situation, but it may equally refer to the cultural norms and expectations that she had experienced in her environment prior to being in jail. Gwen seemed to be recognising that in shifting her self-perception beyond that of a wicked criminal, she might become the “sort of person” who could do drama. Equally, a drama workshop space could welcome Gwen
as herself, providing a sense of acceptance that became another important aspect of her progress that I will explore in more detail later. Beginning to emerge from this exploration of role and renewal is the idea that there existed a rhythm in the workshop space between Gwen’s established self-image, and her conscious efforts to renew this image in her own and others’ eyes.

Gwen’s exploration of new roles, and the rhythm I have described above, appears to be exemplified in the Superheroes exercise that I have described in Chapter 4, inviting participants to create a superhero version of themselves. The instructions I gave were to first lie down on the floor for a guided relaxation after which I encouraged the women to start visualising their superhero. Next I asked them to quietly draw a picture of the superhero, paying attention to the costume, and then list what the hero’s powers would be. I then asked the participants to pair up, and for each to use her partner as “intelligent clay” (see Diamond, 2007, p. 95) in which to sculpt an image of her superhero self, before introducing and describing the superhero to the rest of the group. When the exercise first began, Gwen had doubts and approached me saying, “I don’t have any qualities,” so I suggested that she draw on her skills in writing and storytelling (R 13). Gwen also did not enjoy having to draw a picture - drawing was not her strong point (R 13; see also II 1), and she later said that she had not understood the connection between drawing and drama (Gwen, II 1). When it came to the presentation of the superheroes, Gwen was paired up with Rachel. She positioned Rachel in an image of calm command, standing with a finger gently pointing outward, and her other arm curved around under her breast. She introduced the hero:

Magic Mother, all right...cop out. Her special talent and ability is that she keeps her house spotless by a touch or a point. Everything is clean and sparkly. She also instils in her children a wonderful feeling of wellbeing. She offers care and compassion 24/7. She also holds down a job, keeps the yard clean and she’s constantly on the move. And the kids like her... [she has] no specific uniform because she has so many children to care for and some of them don’t like the uniform, so she just dresses comfortably so that she and the children can be comfortable together. She’s an excellent cook – not too much of a dietician, but she’s an excellent cook. (Gwen, S 13)

Magic Mother possesses the magic of Samantha Stevens from the 1960s television series “Bewitched” (Sacks, 1964-1972), making everything perfect with the point of a finger, yet she appears more down to earth in her comfortable clothing and doing yard maintenance. The story contains no partner, other family members or friends, and aside from the brief
mention of a job, there is little sense of the outside world – just a mother and her many children in their home. There appears to be a sense of self-sacrifice, in that everything she is and does is for the children. Indeed, earlier in the program I had been asking the group about possible themes for a performance, and I asked what participants were passionate about. Gwen had replied, “The only thing I’ve ever been passionate about is my children” (S 7).

The other participants’ superheroes were more fanciful and directed their powers to more global issues such as the environment, conflict and social justice. Aamira’s “Wonder Woman” was an Indian warrior princess who spread a message of peace throughout the world. Rachel’s “Seaweed Girl” lived under water and worked towards protecting the marine environment. Grace’s “Mzeka” had a super singing voice and used laughter and music to spread happiness (S 13). During and after this exercise, Gwen seemed ambivalent about her choice of superhero, acknowledging in reflection afterwards that it had been difficult to recognise her own strengths and abilities. When I asked her whether she was happy with her choice of Magic Mother, she replied, “Yeah. It’s something I know I’m comfortable with. Old habits are hard to break. I’m learning new ones in here thank heavens” (Gwen, S 13). I then asked her what kinds of things she was learning inside:

For a long time, outside of our family circle, there wasn’t anybody else that we knew or that we could trust – so we depended on each other. And now I’m divorced, that’s carried over. But in here I’m learning I can do other things besides parenting – I can be another person besides somebody’s mother or somebody’s wife. I can be me, so that’s great. (Gwen, S 13)

A couple of weeks later in our one-to-one interview, she said that she had been “shocking” at the Superheroes exercise. When I asked her why, she replied:

Because of all the things I’ve done, and I’ve done things that most other women would never imagine doing – I’ve climbed waterfalls and I’ve been underground diving in caves – I’ve done things women don’t do. I don’t know what the record books say, but I know factually that I was one of the first female house painters in the state of Queensland. And it sounds small, but it’s quite a thing. There are so many things I’ve done in my life and places I’ve been, and when you asked me, I went, ‘housewife’. (Gwen, II 1)
I went on to ask her why she had made this choice and she replied, "Probably because, to be honest, that's what the biggest part to me is. . . . But afterwards I was thinking . . . I could have done something a lot better than that" (II 1).

The Superheroes exercise was helpful to me in illustrating the rhythmic nature of Gwen's renewal process. The old habits or roles of her former self were being challenged in prison and she was free to explore something closer to what she saw as her real self: "I can be another person besides somebody's mother or somebody's wife. I can be me" (S 13). Yet there was a part of her still attached to the role of mother, and the notion of idealised motherhood. It seems that this exercise and subsequent reflection may have provided Gwen with an opportunity to gain some insight into her own ambivalence, as well as her expanding horizons. She appeared self-conscious from the outset, presenting a version of herself that was safe and known, but did not satisfy her emerging sense of expansion or broadening, perhaps also bound up in her old self-narrative and her concern about how I, and the rest of the group may have perceived her superhero. The structure of the exercise invited Gwen to explicitly draw upon aspects of her current self to inform her depiction of an idealised self. In this case, the rhythmic movement between habit and renewal that underpinned the art of process in Living Stories was clearly evident.

"I Might As Well Be Me"

At some time during the course of the drama program, it occurred to me that I'm the same as the other women. Our life experiences may be different but we have similar fears, similar hopes, similar insecurities. . . .The drama program was probably more than you thought it was. For me it was like opening a (mental) door and inviting me into an alien world, one where I could laugh, talk, play, pretend, and be accepted as I am. (Gwen, Letter, Appendix I)

This extract is from a letter that Gwen sent to me several months after the program finished, and it exemplifies the importance for her of being accepted for who she was. This became an interesting area for analysis within Living Stories in terms of how Gwen was performing and in some cases attempting to expand her sense of who she was. When I first asked what the women wanted to take away from the drama, Patti replied, "Not to be afraid of presenting who you are or who you could be; stepping a bit further out on the stage in all of life" (S 2). It seemed that Gwen also wished to step further out onto that stage, a strong somatic image that challenges the idea of keeping your head down or being bound up. In this statement, Patti alludes to the idea that drama might
offer the freedom to be yourself, to be a better version of yourself and to be somebody else entirely - a layering of actual and fictional roles within the self that I have already discussed as being key to renewal in applied theatre. The previous section of this chapter illustrates some of the roles that Gwen was beginning to challenge within herself - the mother, the wicked criminal - and her apparent recognition that these might limit her expansion into new horizons. In approaching Gwen’s engagement with the program, it therefore seems appropriate to examine what she was revealing in being herself, and in what ways the artistic and actual roles and narratives within Living Stories impacted on her self-creation and renewal process.

**Self and role in the actual frame**

Gwen’s involvement in the jail magazine and the creative writing group were not the only things that signified to me that she had a strong narrative sense. Throughout the program she regularly demonstrated her storytelling abilities within the improvisation and devising exercises that we did, often taking the lead and directing others into the narratives that she had created. During the game Holiday Snaps in which one person narrates their holiday while their team mates create tableaux to match the story, Gwen came up with imaginative ideas for her holiday around Australia, and I noted that she demonstrated quite a dramatic flair in her presentation, weaving a story through the images and linking them together (R 4). The first time we played the Queen Game, I noted that Gwen was very inventive with her descriptions of such fantastical gifts as a fountain of youth, and a cloak that could make you fly (R 9). As mentioned in Chapter 4, Gwen was most imaginative in her contribution to the creation of scenes from symbolic objects. In Session 12, we were doing a blank text exercise and again Gwen was the driving force in her group, directing people and coming up with the storyline. She created a scene of a drug robbery and when I asked why she had chosen that scenario, she replied, “I just wanted to make something up that I thought Mandy would enjoy doing” (R 12). In the session that was focused on Joan of Arc she also took the lead, directing the other two members of her group to create images from St Joan’s life (S 15).

Gwen described the writing that she did for the jail magazine as “nonsense” adventure fantasy stories (GI 1). But the Education Officer, Helen, had an interesting view of her work in the creative writing group. She suggested that Gwen was given to inventing aspects of her own personal history, something that Helen did not think was helpful in a rehabilitative sense.
She thinks she's free, she writes freely, she writes beautifully, but we are concerned that she still is not writing realistically – she's still writing about a world and a background that she has created for herself that's not real. And if she's going to go back there, she really needs to start facing some of those realities and facing some of those demons. (Helen, SI 1)

Helen seems to suggest here that rather than using her writing to face reality, Gwen was using it to escape from it, indicating that Helen perhaps saw the writing as a potentially therapeutic opportunity rather than simply a creative outlet; and for therapeutic outcomes to occur, the participants must be encouraged to “face their demons.” Yet it was Gwen who put forward a different view of personal narrative in the conversation I have described in Chapter 4, where she explained that the constant re-telling of her personal story to the different prison authorities was essentially dragging her back and preventing her from moving forwards (S 4). It seemed that Gwen’s process of renewal involved not only consciously re-casting herself in new roles, but also re-writing her autobiography and shaping a new self-narrative. Viewed through the theoretical frame of my study, Gwen might have been engaged in a creative act of life making (Bruner, 2004, p. 692) through her artistic pursuits. As Dewey (1934) suggests, in aesthetic experience, this process is not simply about acquiring greater skills, but it involves the creation of new meanings from experience that become an integral part of the self (p. 264). Living Stories perhaps provided Gwen with an opportunity to potentially harness her already strong narrative sense and engage in this process in a new and embodied way.

On a couple of occasions, Gwen observed that being accepted by the other women in the drama group was highly significant to her, and she noted that this had had positive repercussions in her other interactions and relationships within the jail. “When I first came to the classroom, there were a couple of issues with a couple of girls which seem to have worked themselves out and settled themselves down” (Gwen, II 1). She also noted, “Everybody seems to leave everything outside and we just come together as a group” (II 1). Yet Gwen’s articulation of this process was interesting in that there appeared to exist a kind of ambivalence between being accepted for who she was, and “pretending” or playing a role in order to be accepted. She described how participating in the drama program had helped her see that she could be liked and accepted by others:

I've just been told for 28 years that nobody likes me, better stay inside, right, and it gets into your head. I didn't start off like that, I was happy, gregarious, got on well with everybody, but over a long period of time, that was cut down and
now I'm trying to start and learn that again. And this [the drama program] was huge in making me wake up to myself... Coming to drama, I had to talk to - I had to be somebody, you know, so I might as well be me. (Gwen, II 2)

The phrase, "I had to be somebody so I might as well be me," points towards the notion that Gwen had lost sight of her sense of self and may have been reaching for a role to play in this new situation. Being herself was risky, not only because of the vulnerability to exposure it entailed, but also because it was such a distant idea that she essentially had to re-learn who this self was. In doing so, Gwen seemed to embrace the idea of role as a way of rehearsing and re-learning this way of being. In our first group interview, I asked if the participants were learning anything from the drama that could be used elsewhere in life. Gwen described how it was becoming easier for her to communicate with people despite her previous inability to initiate conversation most of the time, although she did admit to what she called "cheating": "I sit there and just pretend I'm in different circumstances and have a little chat. I've probably always been able to do that because I've always had a terrible imagination" (GI 1). Although I did not press her further on her pretence, this indicates that Gwen was adept at creating an imaginary fictional context for herself in order to overcome her social anxiety.

In our follow up session after the program finished, we were discussing how the drama developed confidence and commitment when Gwen brought up a fascinating account of how the concept of role had been working for her in expanding her sense of self:

Gwen: If you can start off just play acting, which is kind of like practising, like you go away from there and think that this is similar to what it was like in drama, so you can practice back on, and after a while that practice becomes more of you.

[I talk about how role-play is sometimes conceived as rehearsing for real life.]

Sarah: How have you used it?

Gwen: Mostly at work in the library, dealing with the girls, and you can - you just sort of - well I can just switch it so that instead of being 'Gwen the librarian' [uses flat voice], I can be 'Gwen the librarian' [uses animated, lively voice], you know what I mean? Yeah, you can change yourself if you have to have to.

Sarah: And the second version of Gwen the librarian - is it still you?

Gwen: Yes, absolutely.

Sarah: It's not a role that you play?
There's always that central you, and you can just add bits on and build around it.

And what effect is that having on the people you're connecting with?

I don't know about the effect on them. What I think is the effect on them is, whereas before they saw you as this, heavier person, now they see a lighter side of you, so they respond more happily or something.

So is it improving...

Relationships...

Interactions and relationships for you?

Yes.

Is that with staff and other inmates?

Yes, and it works for me too because I can sort of find myself standing over there in the corner of the room going, 'Oh, she doesn't like me' and then I can go, 'Well she might not like you, but she likes me all right'. You know, dual personalities. (GI 4)

This passage highlights the notion that Gwen's process of self-creation was sometimes a very objective undertaking. She speaks about herself in the third person, objectively seeing the contrast between the two versions of "Gwen the librarian". Her description is almost that of an artist, standing apart and grafting new versions of herself onto something that is essentially her. This enhanced self that she brings into different social situations could be seen as a "performed role" (Heddon, 2008, p. 39), or a "constellation of behaviours" (Granger, 2006, p. 207), but Gwen's view of self also appears to contradict the postmodern, narrative and constructivist notions of self that are discussed in Chapter 2 (see Bruner, 1990, 1991a; Fischer & Goblirsch, 2007; Garrison, 1997, 1998, 2004; Granger, 2001, 2006; Heddon, 2008; Kraus, 2007; Nicholson, 2005; Sarbin, 1997, 1998a, 1998b, 2005; Schiff, 2007; A.-M. Taylor, 2000). Here, she seems to refer to an essential core self to which she would like to return. I never discovered to what degree Gwen already possessed this conscious sense of the interaction between role and self, or if she developed the idea through the drama and our reflections on it; that is, whether her use of role in the artistic frame could have made her more aware of how it operated in the actual frame. Gwen's process of self-making through both narrative and role seemed to combine the fictional and the actual, the remembered and the imagined. Her story therefore begins to demonstrate the complexity of being yourself and the process of self-making within applied theatre's artistic-actual, fictional-factual frames. In Gwen's case, self-making therefore can be seen rhythmically, not only in terms of a movement between habitual roles and
narratives, and innovation and renewal; but also as a movement between Gwen’s perceived “centre” or core of herself that she remembered from her earlier life, and the new roles that were being tried and tested against this. The more gregarious, lighter version of “Gwen the librarian” resulted in more positive relationships with others and perhaps challenged the role of the bound-up prison person. Helen, the Education Officer noticed the emergence of this more gregarious version of Gwen as the program progressed:

As the drama presentation, or the drama group started to develop, so too did the aspects of her personality that I hadn’t seen before. She would initiate conversation with me, she would start coming out with quirky humour. . . . She became a lot more relaxed, and our interactions became a lot more relaxed. (Helen, SI 2)

In Deweyan (1934) terms, this is key in the art of process for Gwen, a dialogical relationship between her performing different roles (doing) and assimilating within herself the effect that those roles were having on herself and others (undergoing). For Gwen therefore, the art of participation can be seen in how her self was being re-made or renewed in response to her new circumstances: An “embodied poetics of the self” (Granger, 2001), wherein there was potential for both personal and cultural renewal.

Self and role in the fictional frame

The description of Gwen’s engagement with role has so far only encompassed how she performed versions of herself within the actual frame of the drama workshops and her other experiences within the jail. In an exploration of how the drama might have contributed to a sense of unbinding or renewal for Gwen, I must also interrogate the roles that she performed within the fictional frame of the drama as well, and the nature of her engagement in these performances. Gwen’s articulacy about the interaction between self and role continued when we discussed how fictional roles interacted with the self. She demonstrated an interest in fictional role taking early on, and when I asked the group at the end of Session 4 what they would like to do more of, Gwen was very clear that she would like to do more “role playing and pretending” (S 4). In the Character Building exercise I have described in Chapter 4, in which the women were asked to create a fictional character from a series of “walks”, Gwen began walking upright and quite stiffly with her chin in the air. This then evolved into “Barbara”, a young woman from Melbourne high society who was attending a school of deportment (R 10). In reflection after the next session, I asked the women how taking on roles like
these might impact on us outside of the drama. Gwen suggested that it could give us confidence because the process of moving in and out of role might ultimately make us more aware of who we really are (R 11). Similarly, I asked Gwen in our first interview what she thought of the activities where I explicitly asked people to bring elements of self into the drama. She replied, “Well bringing your own personality into a drama class, yes, you have to. You have to recognise your own so that you can replace it with somebody else’s when you’re playing a role” (Gwen, II 1).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, I noticed in Gwen a certain amount of caution over the course of the program in her improvisations and characterisations. She was never boisterous or loud, nor did she take many performative risks. It appeared that the greatest risk for Gwen was simply being in the group, sharing her ideas and repeatedly placing herself under the scrutiny of others; so it was very rare for her to let go physically or vocally, make a fool of herself or demand attention in the ways that some other participants such as Patti and Tina did. Yet the idea of having the freedom to let go and take more risk in performance certainly attracted her. In our reflection at the end of Session 9 Gwen and Patti discussed how in the drama sessions, they had the freedom to do anything, or be anyone they wanted to be. Gwen then went on to say that they could be much louder in the drama class than they could outside, “It’s a huge relief for us. We can be loud” (R 9). Later in our interview, she emphasised the fact that she felt “much freer” in the drama group than elsewhere (Gwen, II 1). Perhaps because of the inherent risks for Gwen in participating at all, she tended to play it safe in her performances, attracted to roles and characterisations that were more dignified, controlled and physically upright and restrained. A clear example of this was the character of “Barbara” described above, who was prim and proper - dignified and well spoken. Gwen very rarely demonstrated any kind of force, aggression or anger in performance, and one particular moment led me to wonder how much of this may have been a reflection of her life outside of the drama. We were doing an improvisation exercise in which pairs of actors are given a scenario of conflict and must take turns to improvise. The scenario I gave Gwen and Tina was: A man comes home to his partner drunk after being out with his friends. He wants to hide the fact that he’s drunk, because she hates it. She wants him to sleep on the couch. I observed that Gwen did demonstrate some frustration towards her “husband” but nevertheless took on a very subservient role, offering to fetch him more drinks as he lay back on the couch (R 14). I remember trying to push Gwen to play up the conflict in this scene, but even in her frustration, she remained submissive.
When we began the workshop that centred on Joan of Arc in Session 15, I asked the women to choose from a number of different artists' depictions of St Joan and then explain their choice. Gwen explained,

I chose this one because in this picture, her hands are quite calm. She's holding a sword, but her hands look very non-aggressive, like she's just like this [imitates pose] and she's wearing armour, but her stance is quite relaxed. And her face is really really bland, her hair is down tight, she looks like a quiet pensive little person, but if you look at her eyes, her eyes are quite a stand-out in the picture, and you think she'd be very determined; and that if she sort of decided to stand up from that soft position, you would really have a problem to deal with. (S 15)

While there is a hidden strength in this image, Gwen's choice and her explanation was in contrast to those of Grace, Aamira and Kiana for example, who were attracted to the overt power in the warrior-like images of St Joan preparing for, or in the throes of battle (S 15). When it came to devising Grace's scene about Rosa Parks, Gwen took the role of the bus driver whose actions against Ms Parks would provoke her legendary quiet rebellion. But Gwen found it difficult to take this role, responding to Grace's character with friendliness and acceptance, and when I drew attention to the fact that the bus driver was essentially one of the “bad guys” Gwen was not happy about playing the role. “Oh no,” she said, “That's really hard being the nasty character,” (J 20) and in all her performances of the scene she seemed to struggle with representing the bus driver as a forceful authoritarian. This was in direct contrast to Emma, for example, who had no trouble portraying the angry white passenger forcing Parks to move to the black section of the bus; or Tina who took the role of the police officer who forcefully removed her once the conflict was underway. Gwen’s quite rigid and restrained portrayals continued in Mandy’s scenes about Mary McKillop. Here, Gwen and Tina played the additional roles in Mary McKillop’s life, with Gwen first playing the role of the priest who received McKillop’s vows as a young novice, followed by a small child who benefitted from McKillop’s education and charity, and finally a high society Sydney woman from whom Mary came begging in the street. I noted at the time that Gwen enacted the role of the priest extremely well, taking on his lofty language and ritualistic behaviour convincingly. Similarly, as the wealthy woman promenading about town with her husband, Gwen was adept at improvising their posh dialogue and looking down her nose at McKillop. Yet when it came to Gwen and Tina enacting the role of small children playing together, she struggled to take on the voice and physicality of a child. Whereas Tina was immediately able to move into this role, Gwen retained her rather deep adult voice and was unable to
change her physicality to suit the role (J 19). These moments suggest that the somatic abandon required to accurately portray a small child playing, or a demonstrably angry wife, was almost impossible for Gwen; whereas upright, controlled and dignified roles were more within her reach. The performative habits that she had developed over the course of her marriage, and subsequent agoraphobia and self-consciousness, followed by life inside the jail were almost certainly being played out here as well, where even in the fictional frame, she most commonly showed restraint and self control.

Gwen's own choice of *Inspiring Women from History*, as mentioned earlier, was the early Australian humanitarian Caroline Chisholm. She became interested in the history of Chisholm's story, and was quite determined to get the historical facts straight, even undertaking some of her own independent research to inform the story (R 21). She took a similar approach in helping Tina to devise scenes about Anne Frank, contributing a significant amount of historical detail to the process (J 19; R 18). Her initial ideas when we began devising the Caroline Chisholm scenes were quite static – that Chisholm would be sitting at a desk, interviewing a queue of destitute women and consulting an inventory of employment placements for them around the country (S 18). When I suggested that we may need to add some more dynamic elements to the scene, she could not quite see how we could do this, suggesting that this was because she was more of a creative writer (J 19). For Gwen to feel some ownership over the scene, we retained some of her ideas, but also resolved to add a more dynamic scene in which Chisholm would move through the streets of old Sydney, handing out coins to the homeless women. When it came to devising the scene where Chisholm would sit at her desk and find employment placements for the women, Gwen was very methodical in her approach, writing out a list of women's names from the period, and listing Australian towns where they would be placed with fictitious families, admirals and dignitaries. Following our rehearsal, she even corrected Mandy, who was playing the Governor, on a relatively unimportant point of historical accuracy (S 22). Gwen later linked her interest in the historical facts of the story with a kind of "perfectionism", and it seemed to hark to the research work she was doing into women's prisons (II 2). The emphasis for Gwen in the devising and performance of her Caroline Chisholm scenes was therefore quite ordered: lists, inventories, queues, desks, historical facts – almost reminiscent of her newfound role in the prison library. Perhaps this was again a safer option for Gwen, a way to exercise some control over the scene and reduce the risk of failure or of putting herself too far out on the line. From a theatrical perspective, I recognised that this approach to the scene would not be as engaging for the audience,
but at the time I did not recognise its equal lack of somaesthetic potential for Gwen herself. Had we worked harder on making the scene physically more dynamic, I wonder whether this would have been more powerful for her as a performer, potentially unbinding her from her usual performative habits and therefore contributing to her renewal process.

Setting aside Gwen’s more bound-up performances and narratives in Living Stories, there were a few very small moments in which she found herself taking more performative risks, specifically through strong and forceful performances of emotion in role. What is more, these moments stood out to her, and she remembered and spoke about them long after they occurred. During our one-to-one interview after Session 15, Gwen was discussing what she particularly enjoyed and remembered from the workshops so far. She was describing our performance of excerpts from Caryl Churchill’s (1985) *Vinegar Tom*, in which she had been playing the farmer, Jack.

Gwen: I thoroughly enjoyed that. When you said show rage or show something like that, and I showed rage and you sort of went, “Wo! Where did that come from?” I thought well you asked for it! [laughs]
Sarah: Yeah, absolutely.
Gwen: I can do happy I can do sad, it doesn’t matter – I enjoy doing things like that, I enjoy being somebody different.
Sarah: Why?
Gwen: I don’t know. Maybe I’m not happy with who I am, maybe that’s why I’m agoraphobic. I don’t know. I’m going in depth there, but I don’t know – I just enjoy the role play. (II 1)

Six months later in our post program interview, Gwen still recalled this moment fondly when asking if we could incorporate more role-play and characterisation in future programs (GI 4). I find it interesting that she drew a connection between showing forceful emotion and being somebody different. She made this connection again in our second interview when we were discussing the role of Anne Frank with Tina: “It’s different isn’t it, it’s being somebody else – she hasn’t got your emotions” (Gwen, II 2). In another session we were doing the improvisation exercise Emotion Endowments in which a scene is played out in different ways as the facilitator endows characters with specific emotions (R 8). At one point I was in the scene with Gwen, so Rachel took the role of facilitator. We were in role as a family - I was the teenage daughter, Gwen the grandmother and Patti the father. Rachel gave me the emotion “frustrated”, Patti “jolly” and Gwen “psychotic”. This made for a very funny and interesting scene in which
Gwen had a psychotic outburst at Patti and I. Her performance was vocally loud, physically erratic, and she had a wide-eyed look of madness on her face. After we finished the scene Gwen said to me, “You’re looking at me funny!” (R 8) She also said something like, “You didn’t think I was capable of that did you?” Reflecting on the session later, she said she had enjoyed that exercise and when I asked why, she replied, “That’s what acting is about – expressing feelings that you might not be feeling in real life” (R 8). These appear to have been moments of high risk for Gwen, after which she was quite self-conscious but also very satisfied with her performances. Here, it is possible that she was experiencing “dual affect” (Vygostky, as cited in G. M. Bolton, 1984 and O'Toole, 1992), in which she revelled in the performance. She may also have been experiencing the somatic “undergoing” as a result of “doing” emotion in performance (Blair, 2006, 2009; Dewey, 1934); or the emotional quality of metaxis that potentially exists within role, where the intense emotions that she was representing acted in tension with her actual emotional state to produce some kind of new self-knowledge or awareness (see Bundy, 2003a, 2003b; G. M. Bolton, 1984; O'Neill, 1995; O'Toole, 1992). There is a sense that within the spontaneity of these moments, Gwen was also more somatically free and unself-conscious, challenging some of the performative habits that I have described previously, and therefore possibly contributing to a sense of unbinding. In these moments, she may have been experiencing a deeper engagement with role, rather than remaining on the illustrative end of the continuum of acting behaviours that I discussed in Chapter 2 as informed by G. M. Bolton, Morgan and Saxton (1989), O'Neill and O'Toole. Gwen commented at the end of the program that we should pursue more of this kind of characterisation next time, and linked this with being Meryl Streep (GI 4). As I have argued earlier, discussion within Shusterman’s (2000a, 2000b, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012) recent theory of somaesthetics explores what might be included as somaesthetic practices, and begins to extrapolate the theory towards their art-based expressive possibilities (see Arnold, 2005; Jay, 2002; Mullis, 2006a, 2006b, 2008; Petersen, 2013); but it has done little to develop a notion of what it means to be somaesthetically engaged. I would suggest that these moments above might describe somaesthetic engagement for Gwen, whereby she may have been experiencing the kind of aesthetic engagement that occurs when one is using the soma itself as the expressive medium. Somaesthetic engagement might thus push embodied performative habits towards innovation and therefore renewal.

Within Gwen’s decision, “I might as well be me,” the notion of “me” therefore had a number of different possibilities that she explored and experimented with in the
fictional and actual frames of the drama workshop space. Gwen appeared most often to be inclined towards somatically contained or dignified roles; and in dealing with the historical characters of Caroline Chisholm and Anne Frank, her narrative sense was sometimes mired in historical accuracy rather than the fantasy that she contributed to the jail’s magazine and our more playful improvisation games and exercises. She may have reverted to these performative and narrative habits in order to interact safely with the new environment of the drama workshop, and they may have echoed her own habits within the role of bound-up prison person. They point towards a need for control over the body and the narrative, where the very act of placing her body in front of an audience for scrutiny was risky. As a practitioner, I likely encouraged this habitual response by presenting stimuli that lent themselves to such responses rather than those that might contribute to somatic or somaesthetic engagement and unbinding. Yet through the scene from *Vinegar Tom* (Churchill, 1985) and the Emotion Endowments exercise, Gwen seemed to recognise the potential for liberation that existed in more spontaneous moments of forceful emotional representation and somatically engaged performance. She equated the expressing of these extreme emotions with being somebody else, that is, to represent an emotion that was perhaps uncommon in her repertoire took her into the role of another, and in doing so, it may have informed her own process of self-making and renewal. With the help of theorists such as Granger (2006), Hohr (2010), Kuehn (2005), Kupfer (1983), O’Neill (1995) and Taylor and Warner (2006), I have interpreted Dewey’s (1934) term “aesthetic emotion” as a quality of feeling that occurs when one perceives the dynamic form, or the qualitative tensions and rhythms, within an experience; a heightened form of the spontaneous integration between cognition, emotion and action that occurs in aesthetic engagement that leads to new forms of knowing. After the fact, it is impossible to establish at what points the participants in Living Stories may have experienced this intangible state, but the suggestion that Gwen experienced somaesthetic engagement at certain points as described above, where she was shifting from habit to innovation through the embodiment of role, may have led to this holy grail of aesthetic experiencing. This, in turn, would lead to a renewed knowledge of the self that Gwen was performing in “being me.” Alongside this potential for somaesthetic engagement and aesthetic emotion, in these moments there existed the potential for the continuation of Gwen’s renewed self-narrative, where she could see herself, and be seen by others, as something other than a wicked criminal, be accepted by peers in a collaborative creative situation and be the “sort of person” who does drama.
Conclusion

This chapter is predicated on the assumption that Gwen was engaged in a conscious and genuine process of personal renewal since leaving her family and her abusive relationship and coming to prison. In my early days of working with Geese, I was encouraged to question participants’ vociferous claims of reform and rehabilitation, and as I discuss in Chapter 4, the participants in Living Stories appeared to be very conscious of how to play the game in order to be seen favourably by the authorities. However, I believe that Gwen’s descriptions of her engagement in the drama program and other creative activities in the jail were genuine. There was a strong sense that she was on a quest to reclaim and re-make herself, and she seemed to be aware of how embodying different roles and constructing different narratives in both the fictional and actual frames, could contribute to a sense of unbinding and broadening of her horizons. She also began to recognise that emotion was key to this expansion, and seemed to crave more opportunities to take risks in her performance by representing more extreme emotions. Crucial to understanding renewal in Gwen’s case were the different versions of self that she was exploring and performing as she moved through the program. There seemed to be a rhythm at play between the various aspects of her own self-perception: how she once was, how she was becoming since being in jail, how she might be in the future, how she imagined other people saw her and how she could experiment with being somebody else. She was able to revise her sense of self by playing new roles, but also re-write her autobiography through actively engaging in creative and other pursuits within the jail. Personal renewal for Gwen therefore seemed to be a creative process that she was undertaking through creative activities, and the practised method of Living Stories gave her a platform to not only explore, but also reflect upon this interaction between the creativity in her life and in her art. The story therefore leans more strongly towards personal rather than cultural renewal, yet there was the implication that Gwen’s form of self-making would impact on her relationships with others and how they perceived her.

Gwen’s story has highlighted for me that if applied theatre embodies the principle of an art of living, it certainly has the capacity to engage with participants’ own sense of personal renewal and work with this within the art form, rather than necessarily imposing another framework for renewal from outside, from the psychology of rehabilitation for example. I now recognise that in working with Gwen, it was valuable for her to experience the risk of simply getting up in front of an audience and placing herself under the gaze of others; or sharing her ideas, beliefs and creativity with a group
and finding that these were accepted. These broader confidence-building outcomes are commonly associated with applied theatre, particularly in prisons; but in hindsight I might also have been more attuned to how different roles and narratives could stretch Gwen further towards her ideals for renewal. An example would be by providing more opportunities for her to express powerful emotions and unbound forms of physicality— in other words, opportunities for stronger somaesthetic engagement in the process. Rather than seeing this as a therapeutic, rehabilitative or political undertaking, a Deweyan analysis allows me to see this in terms of aesthetic experience, where in improvised and devised forms of applied theatre the pursuit of aesthetically powerful imagery and compelling narratives is inextricably tied to the experience of renewal for the participants who make the work. In other words, the unfolding dramaturgy of participants’ autobiographies is informed and formed by the creative process, and the relative aesthetic (and somaesthetic) power of the performances that are made. This not only eliminates the need for the process versus product argument in applied theatre (see Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006), but it also suggests that an aesthetically engaging product should be the outcome of a somaesthetically engaging process, one can not exist without the other if applied theatre is to be named an art of living.
Chapter 7. Playing with Fire: Tina’s story

“Don't play with me, 'cos you're playing with fire.” (Phelge, 1965)

Introduction

The third participant case story in my analysis centres on Tina, a tall, overweight woman in her early 30s, who had a lethargic, ungainly physicality and a voice that I can only describe as slow motion baby talk: high pitched and somewhat laboured, with a slight lisp. She had been in prison since the age of 18, her entire adult life. Her arms and legs were covered in scarring from burns and possibly self-harm, and she had a slightly vacant look in her large brown eyes. Most of her conversations were peppered with foul language and punctuated by a bubbling giggle. She seemed incredibly immature, almost child-like, until an occasional glimmer of intelligence and insight shone through. I assumed she suffered from trauma and/or mental ill health of some kind, but she disclosed to me only that she had severe anxiety (II 2). She occasionally drifted off during sessions and even fell asleep a few times – a problem that she described in our interview at the end of the program: “Gwen will tell you, I’d sleep 24 hours a day if I could. Hey Gwen?” To which Gwen replied, “Yeah, but that’s because there’s something the matter. When you get that fixed, you’ll be full of energy” (GI 3). Although she joined half way through the program, and despite her apparent lethargy, Tina very quickly threw herself whole-heartedly into many of the games and exercises, being alert and involved when her turn came to perform.

In the previous chapters, I have referred to the bound-up prison person as initially coined by Gwen (II 1); a somatically vivid description of the habitual survival role that prisoners play in order to protect themselves from the physical and emotional risks of their environment. Through Gwen’s story, I have begun to explore in the potential that existed in Living Stories to remove some of this binding and contribute to a process of personal and cultural renewal. I have also begun to explore the complex nature of personal renewal, the tensions within this process of unbinding, and how it might be understood through Shusterman’s (2000a, 2000b, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012) recent theory of somaesthetics. Whereas Gwen seemed to be consciously engaged in a process of personal renewal, Tina did not articulate such intentions to me, and did not engage in deep reflections on her experience of the program. She jokingly suggested that she had joined the program to get out of work, but also admitted that Gwen had
been instrumental in getting her to come along by describing how much fun it was (Tina, S 14; II 2). If anything, Gwen appeared to be more involved in helping Tina towards renewal than Tina herself (Gwen, II 2). This story is therefore more dependent upon my (and to a small degree others') observations of Tina, and an analysis of the nature of her engagement through the theoretical lens I have established for the study. The chapter begins by exploring the violence and the vulnerability in Tina’s story, and how this may have contributed to her version of the bound-up prison person. The chapter then goes on to explore the tensions and rhythms of Tina’s engagement in the project: between Tina’s personal narrative and the fictional frame; the fictional and actual roles that she engaged with both somatically and narratively; and the potential for renewal that may or may not have existed for her in these forms of engagement. Through exploring her story, I now feel that we were figuratively, and sometimes literally, playing with fire where Tina was concerned, and like any kind of fire, this brought with it both risk and possibility.

Violence and Vulnerability

The Education Officer Helen warned me that although Tina appeared to be a vulnerable little girl, she was a very large, strong woman and that the staff at the centre all had her high on their list as a potential danger (J 15). Tina apparently had a fixation with Helen, and had repeatedly threatened her with death, causing a major security issue at the centre. The other Education Officer Nancy also informed me early on that Tina had “burned down her own home” (J 14), although I later discovered there was much more to this story. After a few sessions, Tina began arriving early to the drama program and would regularly sit alone with me and have a chat, sometimes disclosing details of her personal story. One morning, she brought up a news story about a police officer who had been shot in the face by a female suspect. She claimed to know the woman who had done it, which for some reason I did not entirely believe. In this encounter, she also told me about the crime for which she was currently inside – a violent attack, which she described to me in graphic detail (J 21). Throughout the telling of these stories, she used a lot of expletives and seemed to deliver everything with a grin of what looked like relish. Tina’s behaviour, and the information that Helen had given me made me realise that Tina might be potentially dangerous in the workshop space, and yet for some reason I did not feel any sense of threat from her in the way that I had done from Lola. In contrast, over time I felt completely at ease with her, becoming fascinated by her as a person, and finding her story increasingly compelling as more of it came to light.
Alongside the violence and potential danger in Tina’s story, there also existed a strong sense of her vulnerability. Helen related that Tina had been the only woman in BWCC allowed to have a teddy bear, until she became too attached to it, and it had been taken away from her. Apparently this had sparked off a huge security problem within the centre because Tina had reacted very badly (J 15). Tina then confirmed this story during a pre-session conversation among the group. We were on the topic of sleep and Tina said, “I haven’t slept properly since I lost Lamb Chop.” I asked what Lamb Chop was, and she said it was her teddy bear. Mandy asked her why they took Lamb Chop away, and Tina said that the officers thought she was not interacting with other people enough, that she was spending too much time sitting in her room talking to Lamb Chop (J 17). Tina’s vulnerability also became apparent in her reactions to some of the workshop exercises. During the game Mirror Circle, in which participants must watch and imitate the movements of others in the circle, Tina had to step out because she said it made her feel uncomfortable being watched by others (R 16). As I have discussed in Chapter 4, Tina was fiercely reluctant to join the criminogenic rehabilitation programs offered in the centre, afraid of the potential self-disclosure involved (Tina, II 2). Yet she appeared to have no problems disclosing details about herself to me in our one-to-one conversations before sessions. Tina’s participation in the game I Love You Baby, If You Love Me Smile further demonstrated a kind of child-like quality in Tina. In this game, the person in the centre of the circle must try to make those on the outside laugh using the game’s namesake phrase, and Tina appeared to be enjoying herself more than anyone. She kept edging closer to the middle when she was on the outside of the circle as if she wanted to be in the centre. When she succeeded in making me laugh, she joyfully looked around to the others and said, “I made the teacher laugh!” and she had achieved this by doing a particularly lewd pelvic thrust as she was saying the line (R 18).

For Tina, being watched during this exercise was entirely different from being watched in Mirror Circle, perhaps because it contained much more playfulness and an opportunity for her to openly play up to the crowd and experience a measure of success, rather than having to passively be the object of another’s scrutiny.

Without knowing the details of Tina’s mental health, I would suggest that the bound-up prison person was, in part, a somatic manifestation of the violence and trauma that was almost certainly present in her life story. In this sense, I would suggest that she was bound up by her anxiety, paranoia and sense of self-protection; but also her lethargy and lack of physical motivation. Tina was regularly called away from sessions to the health centre, where she said she was being given medication. Without knowing what the medication was, or what it was for, I nevertheless suspected that it was
contributing to her apparent lethargy and slow speech. Easteal (2001) suggests that the overuse of drugs to sedate women prisoners contributes to the dysfunctional culture of the institution, describing it as a form of social control. In my own experience of women's prisons, I have certainly encountered a great many participants who were on strong medication that appeared to affect their energy levels and responses. As I have mentioned previously, women in Australian prisons have been found more likely to experience complex psychological trauma than men (Sorbello et al., 2002), with many experiencing anxiety-related problems that meet the criteria for a diagnosis of posttraumatic stress disorder (Byrne & Howells, 2002). Gwen and Tina's discussion above about there being "something the matter" with her that was making her lethargic may equally have applied to a physical health problem. Either way, I would suggest that being medicated might also have formed a part of Tina's binding, although I must acknowledge that this is an assumption only on my part. In Tina's case, I have therefore interpreted the bound-up prison person as not only a survival response to the environment of the jail, but also a somatic manifestation of her lethargy, anxiety and paranoia. It might be assumed that there was a considerable amount of violence and vulnerability in the narratives and roles of other women who participated in the program; but in Tina's case, it was much more obvious. This shone a light on how potentially fraught the process of unbinding might be.

Into the Flames

My second ever encounter with Tina was in Session 15. Prior to that session, I was feeling a great deal of pressure about the program itself, the promise of five or six new group members arriving that day, and the other demands on me. I spoke with my academic supervisor Penny Bundy, who suggested a play building exercise around the character of Joan of Arc (J 14). I thought this would really connect particularly with Gwen and Mandy, both of whom seemed interested in history and historical figures. But at no point during my planning, and then during several stages of the workshop, did I make the connection between Tina's highly visible burns scarring, Nancy's comment about Tina having burned her own home and Joan of Arc being burnt at the stake. As I was planning the workshop, there were so many other features of St Joan and her story that I felt were interesting that this part of the story did not even register for me. But perhaps unsurprisingly, it certainly seemed to register for Tina. I had explained to the group that we were going to use the historical figure of Joan of Arc as the basis for some play building. We were seated in a circle, and I invited each woman in turn to tell the group what they already knew about St Joan. We went through a discussion about
various aspects of St Joan’s life, with Tina contributing details that she had learned from a movie about her pretending to be a man, leading the army and having her virginity tested by the clergy. At the end of this discussion she said, “She ended up getting burned at the stake in the end” (Tina, S 15). After this, I handed around the different artist representations of St Joan and asked the group to choose one that they particularly liked, for whatever reason. Tina said, “Can you pass us that one with the white dress?” and this was an image of St Joan being burned at the stake. I could hear Gwen talking in the background through this, and at that point she said, “Mmmm, barbecue” (S 15). I then invited the women to describe why they had chosen their image. Tina explained:

Tina: I chose this picture because it shows her bravery and her faith in God that she believes in.
Sarah: How does it show her bravery?
Tina: Well she’s got flames and fire all around her...
Gwen: But she’s not screaming.
Tina: Yeah.
Sarah: And what about her faith – what tells you that she’s still got her faith?
Tina: Well as the flames are getting to her, and she’s holding the cross and she looks like she’s looking up to heaven. (S 15)

During the discussion above, I still had not registered the connection between Tina’s burns and Joan of Arc’s martyrdom. As I have mentioned, I was feeling under pressure, and I was quite focused on the other two new participants as well (Bree and Kiana), hoping that they were finding the session interesting. Listening back to the recording, I could hear that this session was also beset by many distractions: announcements over the intercom about medication; the flushing of toilets; the constant drone of two male officers talking outside. Several people had to leave the session for visits, consultations with staff and so on. All of this added up to me being less grounded and focused as a practitioner than I would have liked to be, and draws attention to the value of having more than one facilitator in a prison context. Yet I find it interesting to look back now and see that Tina appeared to be quite drawn to this element of Joan of Arc’s story. I wonder whether this was a conscious or unconscious choice, and how important the idea of St Joan’s bravery may have been to Tina.

I then went on to ask the women to create tableaux from St Joan’s life in small groups of three. Tina was working with Grace and Gwen. They had created two tableaux, with Gwen taking on the role of director:
Gwen: We need one more.
Tina: We don't want the burning at the stake.
Gwen: We don't want the burning at the stake, no. We're not totally insensitive, just a little bit insensitive. We could do sitting on the horse.
Tina: Someone can be the horse.
Gwen: You can be the horse.
Tina: Okay, I'll be the horse. (S 15)

My feeling of the tableau-making stage was that I was rushing to each of the three groups and trying to help people get their tableaux created. I was particularly preoccupied with Kiana's group because Kiana was losing focus and interest, and I was sensing that she might have some animosity towards Aamira. When, at the point described above, the penny finally dropped about Tina's connection to the St Joan story, it literally stopped me in my tracks (J 15). Where Tina had initially been attracted to the painting of St Joan being burned at the stake, she seemed to be drawing a line at physically embodying that image. I wonder what was going through her mind and her body at this moment of artistic choice, whether there may have been a kind of emotional and/or physical anticipation of how it might feel to embody and express this painful episode again, albeit symbolically; whether the "searchlight" of emotion (Carroll, 1997, p. 201) was causing her recoil from representing St Joan's narrative in this embodied way. In this sense, she may have recognised the potential for undergoing as a result of doing (Dewey, 1934) that underpins the art of process in drama, and she chose to take alternative creative path that would still yield an image, but protect her from a painful experience of making. Listening back to the recording of the session, there did not seem to be any strong emotional response in Tina's voice, it sounded rather matter-of-fact and the conversation flowed undisrupted. Both Tina and Gwen then worked together to create something completely different and slightly humorous, perhaps to move past the potential tension of this moment. It appeared that Tina, with Gwen's help, had successfully regulated the level to which she would need to somatically explore an alignment between the St Joan narrative and her own.

Once the images had been created, I asked the groups to share. Tina's group was first, and I counted them down from three to freeze. Joan (Grace) knelt at the cross (Tina) and was looking at an angel (Gwen up on a chair, hovering over from behind the cross). At the end of the session, I asked the women to reflect on what part of the workshop they liked or disliked most. Tina said she enjoyed the warm-up ball game
Keepy-Uppy the most, saying that it had been fun (S 15). Tina did not appear to be particularly affected by the Joan of Arc stimulus either during or at the end of the workshop. The only indication of any issue with the material was her decision not to depict the burning at the stake in her group’s tableaux. Two weeks later, I learned more from Tina about her life story when she arrived early for the session and was chatting to me one-to-one:

She then said she’d been in prison for 14 years. She said that she had been in Boggo Road Jail and that is where she had set fire to her cell with a cellmate. She explained that this was why she had the burns on her body. Whilst she was retelling this part of her story, she was smiling – as if she was proud of what she had done. She described piling up everything into the middle of her cell and setting fire to it. I asked if her cellmate had also been injured, and she said, ‘No, she pulled out at the last minute.’ I mentioned the Joan of Arc exercise we’d done a couple of weeks ago. I said that I hadn’t realised that it may connect too strongly. ‘I hope you were okay with that?’ I said.

‘Yes,’ she replied, ‘It was fine.’ (J 17)

Gwen had also mentioned in our interview that she had to be sensitive around the “burns lady” during the Joan of Arc exercise. I asked her if she thought Tina had been okay with the exercise, and Gwen replied that she was fine, and that she loved drama (Gwen, II 1). But I am left wondering whether it really was fine. This was a highly vulnerable woman, most likely with serious mental health issues. Even if she said it was fine, at some deeper somatic level perhaps it was not. If it really was fine, I wonder what made it so for her. I will never know the nature of the connection she made to Joan of Arc’s story. Perhaps it was a superficial connection, or a subconscious one. She may have emotionally or physically empathised with St Joan, or it is equally possible that she impulsively made a connection with the picture of St Joan being burned at the stake, and then regretted it later. Describing St Joan’s “bravery and faith in god,” she may have seen this as something akin to her own experience, or she may have hoped that her own fiery ritual had been as noble and romantic as St. Joan’s. Seeking an answer to these multiple possibilities from a research perspective may have only risked moving Tina closer to the material from which she appeared to have deliberately distanced herself during the workshop. On the other hand, she had been very forthcoming about describing the actual events surrounding her burns injury. From a therapeutic drama perspective, it may have been valuable for Tina to use the Joan of Arc Story as a symbolic vehicle to explore and process her own traumatic experience (see Emunah,
1994; Jennings, 1995; Landy, 2001), but this was not my purpose, nor was I qualified to help her do so.

During the session that followed my conversation with Tina above, we were playing a series of improvisation games to create some cohesion within the group and develop their improvisation skills before moving into the devising process for our final performance. One of the games was News Report, where three participants take the stage, one as the television anchor, one as the field reporter and one as a witness to events. The facilitator makes suggestions or takes advice from the audience as to what the story might be and the team improvises from there. A team took the stage comprising Tina as the reporter and two others whom I cannot recall (this session was not recorded). Cassie suggested that the story be a prison riot, perhaps because there had recently been a riot in a refugee detention centre reported on the national news.

As the reporter, [Tina] gave a huge amount of detail about all of the events of the riot. . . . She was particularly detailed about how the riot had started. That someone had smuggled a cigarette lighter into the DU [Discipline Unit] and had set fire to the bedclothes. (J 17)

I can recall that Tina was eloquent and animated during this description. She appeared to be completely engaged in the process, and did not struggle at all to improvise the report. This scenario presented another potentially troubling moment in which Tina’s actual life experience and the fictional world of the drama intersected. When Cassie first suggested the riot, I immediately pictured prisoners on the roof with makeshift protest signs. I did not picture a fire being set in a cell. I will never know whether Tina was conscious of the alignment between her own experience of setting fire to her cell and this improvised scenario, making a deliberate narrative choice based on her own life story and infusing the scenario with a kind of factual authenticity. If this were the case, it may have provided her with a stronger sense of engagement and success within the game. On the other hand, she may have been vulnerable in this moment, unable to fully regulate the actual personal experience that she brought to bear on the fictional story.

The episodes described above appeared to me as particularly noticeable and potentially risky examples of alignment between Tina’s actual life experience and the fictional frame of the drama; but they also serve to illustrate the idea that Tina’s participation and engagement in those moments may have been enhanced by this risky alignment; but only up to a point. Tina was able to narrate her experience of burning the cell to me in conversation, and as the reporter, narrate the events of the fictional prison
riot in ways that echoed her own actual experience. She chose a picture of St Joan that depicted her martyrdom, and was able to point out the features of this image that had attracted her. But when it came to a somatic engagement with Joan of Arc's martyrdom through the tableau exercise, Tina (consciously or unconsciously) appeared to draw the line, and deferred to Gwen's more light-hearted suggestion of embodying the image of the horse. I wonder whether Tina was at this moment afraid of a level of engagement that might move her beyond the cognitive and more controlled structures of narrative towards an embodied re-enactment of a past trauma. These episodes therefore illustrate a rhythm in Tina's story, not only between her actual personal narrative and the fictional world of the drama, but also between the narrative and the somatic in her level of engagement and participation. In these fiery examples, it appears that Tina may have consciously or unconsciously drawn on a significant and traumatic event in order to succeed in the present moment of improvised drama. While this may have given her a sense of success or mastery in responding to the task, it may also have kept her grounded in a destructive self-narrative that might stifle renewal. On the other hand, these examples might serve to illustrate the complexity of renewal in devised and improvised drama, where, as I have suggested in previous chapters, the fabric of a renewed present is woven with the threads of the past in the embodied rhythm between habit and innovation (Dewey, 1934; Granger, 2001, 2006, 2010; Shusterman, 2000a, 2009a, 2011a). Tina's inclusion of these risky narratives may therefore have been a necessary element in the art of participation for her, as she explored ways to interact with the environment of the drama workshop context.

"Making Something out of Nothing"

From our conversations, I got the sense that despite Tina having been in jail for a crime committed 14 years previously, her criminal life was still very present in her mind – that it was a current and essential element of her autobiography, and her role as a criminal an important element of her self-image. Indeed, it is perhaps unsurprising that a woman who had been incarcerated for her entire adult life would see herself this way, and this could be seen as a significant aspect of her bound-up prison person role. In our interview after the presentation, Tina said that she had enjoyed portraying the role of the police officer in the Rosa Parks scene, "'Cos usually all the time I'm on the other side of the fence (laughs). I'm always a criminal, so I thought I'd be a copper and a nark for a change" (Tina, II 2). A little later, she described her tendency towards nervous laughter in court, and how this had landed her in trouble. Here, her description began in the past tense, but then moved to the present tense, describing events as though they
were still occurring (II 2). During our one-to-one chats, she often expressed opinions and attitudes that were reflective of the criminal culture around her: hate the police, hate the screws, and watch your back. Aside from appearing to reinforce her own role as a criminal, I also wondered whether Tina perhaps played up to an image of dangerous madness. For example, the apparent glee that she demonstrated when describing the violence of her offence and the burning of her cell could have been designed to shock me, to show me a mask of unhinged criminality that would keep me from becoming a threat. On the other hand, it may have been similar to the nervous laughter that she displayed in court — some kind of unintentional response to stress or trauma. Again these possibilities take me into psychological territory that is beyond the scope of this study (and my ability as a practitioner), but whether taken by her, or bestowed upon her by others, these images of Tina had the potential to colour how I, and others, viewed her, and thus they were significant in terms of her potential for renewal.

Tina had a very strong ability to improvise, which I initially found surprising given her otherwise lethargic demeanour. In improvisation games, she consistently demonstrated an ability to think quickly, to come up with innovative scenarios and characters, and to make the rest of the group laugh. Yet despite the apparent success in these moments, it seemed that the narratives and roles that she presented in improvisation had the potential to reinforce negative images of Tina in terms of her mental ill health and criminality, but also the potential to shift them. On one such occasion, we were playing the game Party Quirks, where one participant hosts a fictional party, and one-by-one guests must enter who have particular personality quirks that the host must guess. Tina chose to be a cannibal. In her enactment, she came to the door of the party and said, “I’ve brought you a cake that I made myself.” Of course this made us all laugh because we knew what could be in that cake. After that, she showed a great deal of relish in becoming the cannibal. Each time she was offered something to eat, she took the food and savoured it in a vicious style not unlike Hannibal Lecter from “The Silence of the Lambs” (Utt, Saxon, & Bozeman, 1991) (J 17). At the time, with my knowledge of the violence in Tina’s story, and my emerging sense of her as having serious mental health issues, I worried that this kind of depiction was not necessarily a positive thing for Tina to pursue. In my journal I referred back to the role theory that had informed my work with Geese Theatre Company (see Baim et al., 2002), noting that it might be valuable to provide her with opportunities to expand her role repertoire in more positive ways (J 17). Yet Tina’s role as the party-going cannibal had made everyone laugh and through it, she demonstrated skills in improvisation that were far
ahead of the rest of the group. To my mind, another similar instance occurred during
the final presentation when we showed an example of the game Occupation
Endowments in which the audience calls out an occupation and the team of actors
begins a scene based on that occupation. A team member who has been waiting outside
must then enter the scene and be endowed with the occupation by the other actors
without any prior knowledge. In one round of this game during our final presentation,
the audience nominated the occupation as Dolphin Trainer, and immediately Tina
began the scene by throwing herself into the role of a crazed dolphin that was attacking
one of the marine park workers. She rolled around on the floor, squeaking loudly and
thrashing around. The audience howled with laughter. When Gwen entered as the
dolphin trainer, Tina continued to thrash around and be disobedient. Finally Gwen
suggested feeding fish to the dolphin to calm it down. Tina acquiesced and obediently
dived through the hoop. The audience applauded and the scene finished (S 23). Once
again, Tina was taking on an unhinged or crazy role to great comedic effect. I wonder
whether the audience found this scene even funnier, given that they had prior
knowledge of Tina as a person. This seemed to be a double-edged sword for Tina,
where these roles allowed her to succeed and indeed master the improvisation games,
eliciting what was on the face of it, a very positive response in the audience. But the
audience response may also have contained an element of cruelty, or Tina may have
been showing a tendency to typecast herself. On the other hand, Tina’s enactment of
the dolphin was uncharacteristically embodied and energetic – in complete contrast to
the lethargy and disengagement that she showed during discussions, or when she was
not involved directly in a scene. In this sense, she seemed to be demonstrating a positive
form of somatic, perhaps even somaesthetic engagement, itself a kind of renewal in
terms of her usual disembodied response to the environment of the jail.

Tina did not always enjoy success in aligning her improvisational offers with her
own life experience or roles. In one such episode, while we were playing the Queen
Game, Emma was playing the role of the queen when Tina offered a giant teddy bear as
a gift. “Why would I want that?” The queen asked contemptuously.
“I dunno,” replied Tina, “I just thought of something I would want” (J 19). Tina clearly
seemed to be harking back here to her relationship with Lamb Chop, and I wonder how
she felt in this moment, where her offer of something close to her own heart was
rejected by the fictional queen. It was difficult to tell whether Emma was speaking in
role, or was genuinely bemused by Tina’s offer. Similarly, Tina responded in a way that
sounded genuinely chastened - like she herself was being spurned. A few sessions later
during our rehearsals for the final presentation, Tina spent much of the time disengaged and doodling on one of the scripts. When I collected the papers at the end of the session, I saw that she had drawn a picture of a teddy bear in blue biro. Like the example during I Love You Baby... where she joyfully exclaimed that she had “made the teacher laugh”, these moments reminded me just how potentially vulnerable Tina was in the space, and how her highly competent and inventive improvisations could equally be offset by a childlike naïveté and fragility.

These examples bring to light what I see as a key tension in Tina’s engagement with the program. There is a strong narrative within prison theatre literature and practice that the work allows participants to see themselves differently and to be seen differently by others by virtue of them undertaking a positive activity that does not revolve around criminal behaviours (see Buell, 2011; Charlebois, 2011; Dworin, 2011; Shailor, 2011, pp. 17-32; J. Taylor, 2011), but as with Gwen’s story, it was not necessarily that simple for Tina. At that time, I was beginning to feel that some of the ways in which Tina was being seen, some of the possible selves (O’Neill, 1995, p. 79) that she was exploring in the drama, may be reinforcing negative aspects of identity that would be better left behind. In this case, the drama was not always providing the potential to “transcend the social roles and types that in real life [participants] may have been unable to elude” (O’Neill, p. 79). On the other hand, as discussed in the previous section, the risky life narratives that informed Tina’s improvisation in the dramatic frame may have been a necessary part of the rhythm between habit and innovation that leads to renewal in the creative process.

Yet there were other times in which Tina was able to demonstrate strong improvisational and comedic instincts, without resorting to crazy roles or laying bare her vulnerability. In a second round of Occupation Endowments in our final presentation, Tina was sent outside while the audience decided on the occupation of bricklayer. When she returned to the crisis on the building site, Tina asked, “What’s the problem?” Gwen, replied, “The problem is there’s a brick wall about to fall on top of you!” Emma suggested that Tina should help out, to which Tina replied, “I’m on lunch break. I’ve still got five minutes left.” The audience laughed loudly at and clapped at this (S 23). She also demonstrated a great deal of ability in both Mandy and Grace’s scenes in the final presentation. During the scene about Mary McKillop, Tina and Gwen portrayed a posh couple, affronted at Mary’s begging for money for the church. Tina seemed to enjoy this very much, promenading around the space with Gwen and chatting about the weather before taking their positions on a couple of footstools to look down haughtily at the
begging nun (S 23). As the police officer in Grace’s scene about Rosa Parks, trying to move Parks off the bus, she was very clear and eloquent, stating: “The law is the law. Who do you think you are?” which drew quite a bit of laughter from the audience (S 23). After our previous final rehearsal, we had all remarked on this scene in particular and Tina’s ability to improvise the role of the police officer (S 22). In our interview, I asked Tina if she had known she had the ability to improvise before she came to the drama program. She replied, “Not in the form of drama, but I’m very good at making something out of nothing, like I’m very creative arts and craft wise. Just give me a bit of cardboard, empty boxes, tape, whatever, I can make something” (Tina, II 2). Tina’s talent for spontaneity and innovation – to make something out of nothing as she put it – demonstrated an artistic sensibility that was here being exercised to positive effect. Tina stated in our interview that the presentation at the end had been her favourite part of the drama program – in particular this scene where she had portrayed the police officer (II 2). I wonder whether this had to do with her success in this role: the positive response she received from the audience and her peers, as well as the opportunity for her to be playful with this authority figure. This moment would have allowed her to succeed in a new context (the drama program), while still conforming to her habitual belief that the police are the enemy.

In Tina’s case, some of the improvisation exercises appeared to provide her with opportunities for embodied, imaginative engagement and experiences of success and mastery. Getting up in front of an audience and dynamically engaging her voice and body appeared in complete contrast to Tina’s usual lethargic, mumbling and monosyllabic engagement during discussions, and as such, it seemed to move her towards a somatic or somaesthetic form of engagement and renewal. Yet these improvisations were often imbued with negative narratives and roles, some of which may have come from her traumatic life story. Perhaps at times this was a productive interaction between her troubled past and the spontaneity and humour of the present, a manifestation of her inherent artistry. But at other times, it may have perpetuated, for herself and others, the role and narrative of a vulnerable, dangerous woman-child. The presence of all of these possibilities again supports the notion that self-making in drama is a creative process that has its seeds firmly planted in the soil of the past, as it moves through the present and towards a possible future.
The Diary of Anne Frank

Tina joined the drama program just in time for the devising process that took us towards our final presentation of *Inspiring Women from History*, and her involvement in this aspect of the work brought about further interesting insights in terms of the themes discussed above. By looking specifically at Tina’s creation and portrayal of the story of Anne Frank, it is possible to further explore her somatic and spontaneous engagement in the drama, and to begin examining the role of emotion in this process. Again, the potential alignments between Tina’s own story and that of Anne Frank were also present, raising further questions about the interweaving of the personal/actual and the fictional in her creative process. Tina chose Anne Frank from the selection of historical figures that I shared with the group as described in Chapter 4. The reason that she gave for her choice was that she knew Anne Frank’s story through movies and books (R 17), although I find it interesting that Anne Frank also happened to be the youngest and perhaps most vulnerable out of the available selection. I noted at the time that Tina had also said she was attracted to the “fear and anguish” that Anne Frank must have felt, and when asked to describe her qualities from the picture, Tina suggested she was “strong-willed, determined and brave – an innocent kind of girl” (R 17). Interestingly, she hit upon bravery as a quality, as she had done in response to the Joan of Arc story. The process began with this rather promising start, in which Tina seemed engaged in the story of Anne Frank, and suggested that her scene might depict the family huddled in the attic while Anne wrote in her diary (R 17).

When we began to devise the scene, Tina indicated that she imagined someone else playing Anne Frank, but I urged her to take the role, and to become the narrator via the diary. We set up a process whereby each participant took on the role of a family member, and one by one, they would enter the imaginary apartment and find something for their character to do. While they all did this, whispering, Tina would write in her diary as Anne, narrating her entry aloud as she wrote. During the development of this scene, Tina was sitting off to the side scribbling doodles on the piece of paper I’d given her. She did not seem engaged in what was going on around her, and did not contribute to the work in any way. The participants enacted the daily routine of the family, and once they all lay down to sleep, I said, “Okay, now Anne, you’re going to read aloud from your diary.” Tina did not miss a beat – she immediately picked up the paper and started speaking: “Sunday the eighth of June. I am sitting in the attic and everyone is asleep.” She faltered a couple of times, but I encouraged her and she kept going. When she had finished, she looked up and said, “Is that okay?”
I replied, "How about you say something about how you're feeling."

"I'm scared," she said, "I'm very very scared" (R 18). This was the first moment in which I encouraged Tina to articulate feelings for Anne Frank, and I remember being pleased that she evidently did not seem as disengaged as she had initially appeared. We continued in this vein so that there were created a number of action sequences interspersed with Tina's improvised diary entries. Throughout all of these, Tina sat on the floor to the side of the playing area and faced the audience. At no point did she turn to watch what the players were doing. In our reflection at the end of the session, I asked Tina what she thought and she replied, "I don't really know because I haven't actually seen it" (S 19). In the next session, we invited her to watch from the audience while Mandy took her role and the others replayed the scene. When I asked her again what she thought, she said it was good, however, in my journal, I reflected that she was struggling to stay awake for most of the session (J 20). In both of these sessions, I had empowered the other actors to drive the scene making, and encouraged Tina to sit down and essentially be disembodied from the process, a very unfortunate oversight on my part. While she appeared to be engaged in the moments that affected her, for example the diary narration, for the rest of the time Tina seemed apart from the group – lethargic, silent and uninvolved. At the end of the session, I asked Tina to write out the full final version of the diary entry and bring it with her to the next rehearsal.

Tina arrived at the next session with the diary entry, which she had written herself with some minimal input from Gwen. Although the entry was well-written, it was more like a schedule of daily events and was completely lacking in reflection or emotion: "It is early Saturday morning and mother has woken me up; I choose my favourite dress which is red with white lace around the collar; I spend the next hour or so playing card games with my father..." and so on. I told Tina that the only thing missing was a description of her feelings, that perhaps she could take it away and work on it for the next session. She asked for a pen, and on the spot, just before we were about to run through her scene, and while the rest of us were noisily talking and trying to work out the movements of the Frank family, she bent her head and wrote the final part of the diary entry in about five minutes flat:

Being shut up in this prison is very hard. I have no freedom, can never go outside or have a breath of fresh air. I am always bored and would love to be able to take a walk to the shops. I feel fear to the pit of my stomach, which never leaves me. I feel trapped and uneasy, for fear of what the future holds. (J 19)
I was surprised and very impressed, as I had not seen evidence of her ability to write before now. Once again, Tina was demonstrating the same skills in spontaneous creativity that she had in improvisation games, although this time with the seriousness, articulacy and insight that the situation demanded. By explicitly asking Tina to integrate emotion into her creative process, something new and arguably more powerful emerged. It is impossible after the fact to discover the nature of Tina’s engagement in this moment of writing, but the task demanded that she engage in a form of spontaneous emotional expression. Tina was invited to make an imaginative connection to Anne Frank’s emotions, and it seems possible that her own experience of being imprisoned was brought to bear in another integration between the fictional and the actual. Expressing this integration through a written narrative meant that Tina was not required to embody feelings of boredom, fear and unease in role, and I am led to wonder whether this was therefore a moment of aesthetic (as opposed to somaesthetic) engagement for her.

As I have discussed elsewhere, the scenes for the final presentation were devised very quickly, and with little time for rehearsal. The final Anne Frank scene appeared as a kind of day in the life, with the Frank family going about their daily routine inside the apartment, Tina narrating each part of the day through the diary, and a Nazi officer marching across the stage at regular intervals to reinforce the sense of dread that the inhabitants may be feeling. This last element had been a suggestion from Emma, and it certainly improved what we had developed previously; but the scene was to my mind one of the least engaging. When I listen back to the recording of the scene, it sounds boring. Tina reads the diary entry without much emotion or range in her voice, never moving beyond a kind of monotonous, child-like reading. In rehearsal I had tried to encourage her to engage with the audience, and with the scene going on behind her – to look up, and to display the emotions, particularly within that last emotive passage, but she never seemed able to do so (S 23). My decision to place Tina in the role of narrator clearly had a significant impact on the kind of performance that she was encouraged to give, moving her away from the kind of somatic engagement that she had in her more successful improvisations, and towards a disembodied and static narrative reading. This adversely affected the energy of the scene, but more importantly it seemed to severely limit Tina’s potential engagement in the more dynamic and collaborative aspects of devising and performing the work.
As with all of the participants, I invited Tina to reflect at the end on any similarities that she might have noticed between herself and the character of Anne Frank:

Tina: Yeah. I suppose she worries a lot and I do, I worry a lot. I get paranoid sometimes that people are out to get me...
Mandy: Not on my shift.
[Emma laughs.]
Tina: No, but I suppose, she likes to write.
Sarah: Do you like to write as well Tina?
Tina: When I was younger, but I don’t do it now. (S 22)

In this response, it seems that Tina was again building Anne Frank’s story from her own experience. The story printed on the back of the card with Anne Frank’s image on it had not mentioned worry or paranoia, yet Tina seemed to come to the conclusion that this must have been the case for the girl trapped in the apartment - it became something that she instinctively knew about the girl’s experience. The final passage in Tina’s written diary entry as described earlier was her own creative work, yet in the discussion above she seemed to absorb this into the factual account of Anne Frank’s story. During the hot seat at the end of the presentation, an audience member asked, “Anne, what kept you sane during the time that you were locked up?” She replied, “I was able to count the specks on the walls and write my diary and draw pictures and...yeah” (S 23). Again, a moment in which I believe Tina may have been fusing her own experience with her perceptions about Anne Frank in order to speak from the role.

By its very nature, the narration of a pre-scripted piece encouraged Tina to slide back into being disengaged and lethargic – speaking in monotone and unable to enliven the words with any kind of vocal energy or emotion. On the other hand, the final lines of the diary entry that Tina spontaneously wrote during the devising process were imbued with emotion, and painted an evocative picture of what it might have been like for Anne Frank as a prisoner in her own home. I am left wondering what the impact might have been if I had encouraged Tina to embody these emotions through the role, rather than narrate them from outside the scene. Perhaps she would have been more engaged during the rehearsal process, and this would in turn have provided the kind of somatic engagement in performance that I had seen in her improvisations. And if so, I wonder how Tina would have negotiated the alignment between her own experience of imprisonment and her interpretation of Anne Frank’s story in order to
take her embodied engagement to a somaesthetic level. In a sense, I had encouraged Tina to remain trapped inside Anne Frank’s diary, just as Anne Frank herself had been trapped inside her apartment, and while this may have engaged Tina as a writer, it may have stifled an opportunity for renewal through somatic or even somaesthetic engagement. Yet while somatic engagement on Tina’s part might have produced more rewarding outcomes in terms of process and performance, it could equally have posed a risk in terms of Tina’s vulnerability – inviting an unsafe closeness between her own experiences of imprisonment, worry and paranoia and those that she perceived in Anne Frank.

The Dark Side of Renewal

One of my central aims for this study has been to interrogate the notion of renewal, and how participation in Living Stories may or may not have facilitated this. The idea of the bound-up prison person as named by Gwen has become a kind of qualitative base line measure for how participants might begin their engagement with the drama workshop program, with the idea that each participant might demonstrate different versions of this binding. The question of renewal is therefore linked to whether the drama began to loosen these binds, and if so, how and with what consequences. In the eyes of the Education Officers, the fact that Tina engaged in the program at all was a small victory, given that she had disengaged from other forms of programming within the centre (see Nancy, SI 1). As I have discussed in Chapter 4, Tina felt safe in this environment, and not under threat that details of her personal life would be heard by other prisoners and used against her (see II 2). Not only did Tina engage in the process, but she also surprised everyone by performing in front of the much-hated figure of Helen in our final presentation. Initially refusing to do so (see R 17), Tina took an ethical decision to rise above her feelings of hostility for the greater good of the group (see Helen, SI 2; Gwen and Tina, II 2). And through her participation and the final performance, Tina showed a side of herself to others that was different from the norm. Mandy noted in our presentation debrief:

Tina’s normally a really shy person... she just won’t talk to everyone here.
She’s shy and she just stepped up... and she was a completely different person
to normal Tina when she was acting. She carried them. (GI 3)

Similarly, after the presentation Helen noted:

I’ve always known Tina to be fairly monosyllabic – she gives very very brief answers. The fact that she was joining together two and three sentences and
showing humour, inventiveness I thought was, again, a very different side of her personality. (Helen, SI 2)

These responses indicate that Tina’s process of unbinding, however complex, did have cultural implications. She took an ethical decision to participate in the final presentation, and performed in ways that changed how Mandy and Helen saw her. The idea that she “carried them” as described by Mandy, may refer to the fact that she carried the scenes, or that she carried the audience along with her performances. She felt safe to expose aspects of herself (both negative and positive) in the playful and fictional context of the drama group, without the need for extensive self-disclosure. All of these small outcomes had the potential to impact on her relationships with staff and other prisoners in the jail.

In our final interview, I asked Tina why she was attracted to the darkness in terms of the stories she told and characters she portrayed, for example, the prison riot, the Hannibal Lecter character and Anne Frank’s pain and suffering. At first she said she did not know, but when I shared that I too was interested in those darker stories she replied: “I suppose because I’ve lived a lot of things, I mean, I’ve seen a lot of bad things and been through a lot of bad things” (Tina, II 2). Had we been engaged in a therapeutic drama process, I may have deliberately manipulated our movement through the terrain between Tina’s actual painful experiences and the fictional frame of the drama, encouraging her to achieve the “aesthetic distance” (Landy, 2001, pp. 214-215) that would potentially allow her to deal with her trauma through the creative process. This echoes the quality of “detached involvement” that O’Neill suggests is indicated by G. M. Bolton’s (1984) term “percipient” (1995, p. 125) in process drama, who is involved simultaneously in the creation and perception of the unfolding drama. O’Neill also relates this quality to the “spectactor” in Boal’s (1985) *Theatre of the Oppressed*, who is encouraged to simultaneously embody and critique the group’s collectivised oppressions (see also Boal, 1995, 2002, 2006; Cohen-Cruz & Schutzman, 2006; Diamond, 2007). All of these terms describe the rhythm between doing and undergoing, subject and object that for Dewey (1934) lives within any aesthetic experience, and that I have expanded upon in previous chapters to describe applied theatre as an art of process. In these applied forms of drama, there is a sense that these rhythms are being intentionally manipulated in order to achieve specific therapeutic, educative or political outcomes. In the case of Living Stories, I found it difficult at times to negotiate these rhythms, where as I have described previously, I was experimenting with aspects of all of these forms, while also attempting to engage the women as artists, by developing drama skills and pursuing a devised performance outcome. For Tina as an artist, the “searchlight” of
emotion (Carroll, 1997, p. 201) would often seek out roles and narratives that were familiar, perhaps attractive, yet potentially problematic in terms of how they aligned with her own experience and how they might perpetuate a negative self-image. The positive, somatically engaged, energetic image of Tina was at times offset by these darker roles and stories. Yet the theoretical lens that I have established for the study, and the literature that I have explored to support it, enables me to see the perverse beauty, disharmony and disturbance in Tina’s story as vital elements of her experience. I would suggest that rather than leading her on a path towards unwaveringly positive renewal, the process saw her embrace the darker aspects of her painful life story in the service of her unbinding. Tina’s story was therefore an example of how the art of living may not be characterised by a relentless march towards goodness.

Conclusion

Beyond the simple act of participation, Tina’s navigation through the fictional and actual frames of the drama workshop space was fraught with potential dangers and alive with possibilities. The dramatic work that we did during the workshop was only part of Tina’s story, with the one-to-one conversations with Tina herself, as well as briefings with staff, giving me rare insight into her troubling personal narrative. In applied theatre projects such as these, the border between the fictional and the actual can be more closely examined in the context of the participant’s life story, which is often shared in breaks or moments outside the dramatic frame. As a practitioner, I felt a significant amount of risk and danger in her participation, particularly as we negotiated these rhythms and tensions between her personal story and her role in the prison; and the stories and roles that she created and embodied in the drama. As we explored these rhythms and tensions, another important workshop rhythm emerged, between Tina’s narrative engagement and her somatic/somaesthetic engagement. Where the former was possibly a safe, distanced way of describing Joan of Arc and Anne Frank’s stories, it was a more static engagement that may have kept Tina closer to her manifestation of the bound-up prison person – cautious, tired, lethargic and physically unmotivated. Tina’s somatic and somaesthetic engagement in improvisations moved her out of this static space, and brought forth a dynamic, spontaneous actor who experienced the successful artistry of “making something out of nothing”; of spontaneously drawing upon one’s store of roles and stories in order to create something new and humorous. Yet at times, this success may have come at a price, reinforcing a negative image of Tina’s child-like madness. Through Tina’s story, I have hopefully reinforced the idea that renewal in applied theatre is not as simple as experimenting with new roles, trying something new,
or showing a new (better) side of oneself. Nor, I believe, should practitioners necessarily strive for positive and harmonious transformative outcomes. It is a messy art of living that equally reflects the disharmony, disturbance and misery of human life. Dewey's (1934) theory would suggest that in the context of a drama process, the embodied self is the medium through which the roles and narratives of the past and present are transfigured through the creative process, resulting in a constant dynamic interplay between art and life. The practitioner or dramatist deliberately manipulates this rhythm in different ways depending on the form in which they are working and the outcomes they hope to achieve. Working in a loose play, improvisation and devising structure, I experienced the freedom to experiment (and sometimes fail) in walking Tina through this terrain, and the privilege (and sometimes fear) of seeing how she negotiated it for herself.
Chapter 8. Show Some Emotion: Mandy's Story

Show some emotion
Put expression in your eyes
Light up if you're feeling happy
But if it's bad then let those tears roll down. (Armatrading, 1977)

Introduction

This is the fourth and final individual case story that I will use to develop my understanding of how Living Stories might have engaged the participants and facilitated movement towards different forms of renewal through the four key principles: The art of knowing, the art of participation, the art of process and the art of living. Mandy was a 38-year-old woman who had been in BWCC for nearly three years when I met her. She mentioned that she had some Indigenous heritage and attended the cultural programs that were run by Aboriginal Elders in the centre; however she said she was not sure which tribe was in her ancestry (GI 4), nor did she make any reference to her culture throughout the course of Living Stories. Mandy appeared to have high status within the centre, which was clear from her interactions and behaviour both inside and outside the workshop space. I never observed her wielding power or exerting her will over other women, but I could see that they treated her with respect, and she carried herself with a sense of self-assurance, as though she knew the ropes at BWCC. Mandy came to the first workshop and attended the program until the end, only missing a few sessions due to illness or other official appointments. In the beginning, she was very quiet and sat apart from the group, only contributing a small amount, and with little commitment visible to me. Later in the program, she began to loosen up, smile more, became more physically involved and appeared more committed to the process. A significant aspect of Mandy’s interest in the drama was that her daughter was doing drama at school, and she felt that it would give them something in common to chat about on the phone and in visits (S 3). Mandy also said she had enjoyed doing drama at school (II 2), but not elsewhere on the outside, although she did say, “I’ve always thought about it” (GI 3).

When I was asking the group at the end of the program what areas of the research interested them, Mandy suggested that I should investigate the potential for drama to expand the range of emotions expressed and represented by participants (GI 3). This interest in emotion appeared to evolve gradually over the course of the program as Mandy herself appeared to become more trusting and committed to the process, and
it appeared to be a significant element of how she experienced renewal in the project. My understanding of emotion in applied theatre is articulated in the review of literature (Chapter 2), where I have integrated Bruner (1986, 1990, 1991a, 1991b, 2004) and Dewey’s (1934) views with those of theorists such as Best (1992), Blair (2006, 2009), G. M. Bolton (1984), Carroll (1997), Courtney (1995), Fesmire (2003), Granger (2001, 2006), Higgins (2008), Hurley (2010), P. W. Jackson (1998), Johnson (2007), Lutterbie (2006), Nohl (2009), O’Neill (1995), Rasmussen and Gürgens (2006), Taylor and Warner (2006) and Vygotsky (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1994). These theorists have informed a complex view of emotion in applied theatre that involves the subjective experiencing of emotion and its outward expression and representation through play and performance – with these sometimes operating in a simultaneous metaxic tension that might elicit aesthetic emotion (Dewey, 1934) – an integration of cognition, imagination emotion and action that is indicative of aesthetic engagement. Emotion is also present within the spontaneity of the creative process, operating as a qualitative searchlight to inform and colour the structuring of narratives and roles within the drama. Emotion is both subjectively felt, and culturally situated and constructed, and reflects the rhythm of doing and undergoing in Dewey’s view of experience. The emergent approach to the research that I have described in Chapter 3 meant that I did not intentionally focus on emotion in my reflective and research questions until Mandy started to draw my attention to it, therefore I must rely to some degree on a retrospective and speculative reading of the earlier data in terms of emotion where Mandy is concerned.

This chapter will begin with an analysis of how the bound-up prison person appeared to manifest in Mandy’s case, particularly in terms of emotion and spontaneity. Through this first section, I will also describe what seemed to be an evolving interest in emotion for Mandy as she progressed through the program. I will then go on to discuss how Mandy may have experienced emotion (and potential emotional unbinding) through spontaneity in improvisation more generally, and then through the role of Mary McKillop whom she chose for our Inspiring Women from History presentation. It will conclude with a summative analysis of how Mandy may have experienced renewal, and how this process, in her case, appeared to be driven by emotion. In one sense, this chapter could be read as another of prison theatre’s usual transformative narratives, however, through the prism of emotion, I hope to explore the more complex aspects of this transformative arc – the “secrets within the sequence” (Kermode, 1981, p. 84) – and try to understand specifically what drove it for Mandy.
Emotional Binding

The bound-up prison person as described in previous chapters appeared to manifest in very specific ways where Mandy was concerned, and of all the women, her embodiment of this role seemed to me the most obvious and entrenched. Like Gwen, Mandy was quite articulate about this role, although where Gwen described being self-conscious and careful, Mandy alluded to (and I observed in her) a sense of institutionalised alienation. At the beginning of the program, she was extremely guarded. She had no top teeth and rarely smiled, and if it was not for the occasional glint in her eye, I might have thought she was bored or even annoyed. She would sit away from the group, her arms folded, head tilted back and her eyes open wide and staring out the window. It seemed as if she was not listening to anything much I would say, until a dry witty comment would escape her tight lips with a harsh nasal tone and broad Australian accent. In recordings of our earlier sessions, her voice is not even present, with other group members dominating the discussion. Later, I observed that she was noticeably “minimal” in her approach (J 21) – minimal movement, minimal talk, minimal effort. This echoed her version of the bound-up prison person as running on bare minimum as described in Chapter 4 (GI 4). If a ball fell at her feet during our group juggling game, she would wait for someone else to pick it up (see R 16). She would hardly ever throw her body into anything. Even after Session 21, I noted Mandy’s limited capacity for facial expressiveness, observing that she had quite a stony face most of the time; although I did observe that she was smiling more often than she had previously, and I wondered if this had something to do with her getting a new set of dentures (J 21).

During our regular check-in, where I asked the women to share how they were feeling “physically, mentally and emotionally,” Mandy would most often reply with words that lacked any sort of emotional complexity: “good,” or “fine,” and when I banned the use of the words “good” and “bad” in the check-in, she replaced it with “cruising” (see R 15). Mandy responded similarly during our first one-to-one interview when I asked her how she felt about the drama program so far (II 1); and her use of minimal description even became the source of a joke for us later in the program, when I asked Mandy how she felt about her scene, and she mischievously replied with one word, “good,” after which we both laughed (S 19). This lack of emotional colour in Mandy’s vocabulary was reflected in her own perception of life in BWCC. At the end of Session 9, I asked everyone to think of one thing from the drama class that might help them get through the rest of the day outside – “A thought, an emotion, something that happened.”
Mandy said that she would take a happy feeling from the workshop: "There are only two feelings in here: happy or angry" (R 9).

Looking back, this was one of the first signals to Mandy's interest in emotional expression, and it began to illustrate how she perceived the culture of BWCC. Another clue appeared early on when I asked the group what drama skills they thought they would be developing through the process. She replied, "Facial expressions, speech," (S 3) and coming from someone who maintained a stony face and a deadpan, tight-lipped, monotonous vocal delivery, I now wonder whether she was conscious of a need to expand her facial and vocal range. Another clue to her interest came four sessions later, when we were reflecting on the themes that had emerged from the Significant Objects exercise that I have described in Chapter 4. Interestingly, Mandy chose not to share a real object, but instead described a diamond from a fictional jewellery heist that had occurred in one of our previous improvisation games (J 7). When I asked the group to identify any themes that had emerged from the exercise, Mandy suggested, "Emotional attachments, then extends to physical...you know what I mean, like emotional attachments or something, then extends to a physical phase 'cos you could cry/lash out at people. . . . Action becomes a reaction." I asked her if she meant this was something she would like to explore as a theme. "No," she replied, "I'm just saying. That's kind of drama really – emotional, you're thinking and acting physical" (S 7). I wonder now whether Mandy chose not to share a sentimental object with the group as part of her self-protection. I did not ask her what prompted the observation that followed the exercise, and I wonder if it was in part due to the notion that people were emotionally attached to the objects they were describing, and this came across in their storytelling and performance. Mandy's description reflects the integrated, somatic nature of emotional representation in drama that I discuss in previous chapters (see Blair, 2006, 2009; G. M. Bolton, 1984; Courtney, 1995; Dewey, 1934). It is unfortunate that I did not have the presence of mind to probe her further on this, but her statement certainly indicates that this was an area that was giving her cause for reflection. Her suggestion that emotional attachments lead to physical responses, which in turn, lead to further reactions indicates that she may have been grappling with the very nature of emotion as it occurs within the self-world interaction in both drama and life. A further clue to Mandy's evolving sense of emotion in drama occurred during our reflection after Session 8, where we had been doing the improvisation exercise Emotion Endowments that I have also described in Gwen's story. In the first scenario, Rachel, Mandy and Grace played a mother, aunty and baby respectively, whose situation was that the

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mother had just come home from a hard day at work, and found the aunt, who was babysitting, had given the child something she wasn't supposed to have. I gave Rachel the emotion of “hopelessness” and Mandy the emotion of “anger”. She became quite cutting and sarcastic, and I side-coached her a couple of times to try to ramp up the anger, but she did not seem able to raise her voice or make her energy escalate further than a kind of passive aggression (R 8). When we reflected on it afterwards, Rachel said she had struggled to express hopelessness. Mandy suggested that this might be because we normally keep emotions inside, and bringing them out is difficult (R 8). This statement briefly pre-empted what she later came to describe in more detail about her experience of emotional repression.

The moments described above represent the only allusions or explicit references to emotion that Mandy made until our reflective group discussion after the final presentation, when she again brought up the binary nature of emotion in BWCC, and mentioned the idea that drama could expand her emotional range. It came just after we had been discussing Tina’s development over the course of the program, and I had suggested that her confidence had been progressively uncovered as the weeks had gone by (GI 3). I don’t know if it was the word “uncovered” that spurred Mandy to go into this, but it is interesting to consider that it may have been. She followed my comments with this:

Mandy: And because we’ve been in for a long time, you know what I mean, really we only have two emotions: happy or sad in here, there’s no middle ground, there’s no nearly happy, there’s no nearly sad. There’s two emotions – that’s it, you know what I mean? And what you’re displaying isn’t what’s in here [points to her chest].

Sarah: What is that relevant for in the drama – do you mean that in here you’re displaying it more?

Mandy: Yeah. All different emotions – not just the base ones that we’ve got to put on every day, you know what I mean? Where they kick you in the guts, but you’ve got to make out ‘I’m very grateful for that.’ You know what I mean?

Sarah: Yeah, so you can be more honest in here with showing your feelings?

Mandy: Yeah. It took a while but, yeah, you realise you can let out all different emotions.

Sarah: As characters or as yourselves or both?
Mandy: Both. Because when you become a character there's different emotions there that you've got to...you know what I mean? And you stop your emotions like Mandy, and be Mary's emotions. (GI 3)

By suggesting that there is no nearly happy or nearly sad or sense of a middle ground, it seems that Mandy was alluding to the fact that there is no subtlety or nuance in the emotions that are displayed or “put on” in jail. The simplistic happy/sad binary, or the “base emotions” that are present in the jail mask do not reflect the complexity of what is really happening inside. This is slightly different from Geese Theatre Company’s conception of mask, where the mask represents the outward behaviour, and the emotional life exists underneath it (Baim et al., 2002; Watson, 2009). Mandy was suggesting here that she employed an emotional front or outward expression of emotion that sent a simplified message about what may really be going on for her. This was possibly a habit that she also resorted to in our early interactions as she approached the new environment of the drama workshop space, for example her minimal responses in the daily check-in and our first one-to-one interview (Mandy, II 1). Following Mandy’s observation, perhaps showing happiness or sadness would not necessarily make one vulnerable, but showing the nuances of those emotions would be risky because it would lead to the exposure of more information to others. This leads me to suppose that Mandy consciously chose the level of emotional expression to outwardly show, which would indicate that she was therefore engaged in a form of emotional representation for the benefit of her viewing public (staff and other prisoners). If so, this would take emotional representation beyond the artistic frame of the creative process described by G. M. Bolton (1984), and into the realm of the actual. In this case, there is a possibility that representing emotion in the context of the drama may ultimately have led Mandy to understand more clearly how she was doing it elsewhere in her life. Mandy’s final statement about engaging emotion both in and out of role suggests that she is referring to the emotional discharge and expression that was possible in through play and reflection in the workshop space, but then also the representation of emotion in which she engaged in role as Mary McKillop. It was a little later in the discussion that Mandy suggested we explore emotion through the research (GI 3).

Mandy’s understanding of these concepts appeared to develop further in our one-to-one interview that followed the final presentation and reflection (II 2). I brought up the idea of emotions in jail, the sense that there was only happy and sad, and asked her why she thought that emotions were so black and white inside. She replied that she
was usually “on an equal level”, explaining that this was a survival mechanism. “I’ve learned not to show emotions,” although she was clear that this only applied in jail. I asked her what the danger was of showing emotions in jail:

Mandy: Well, to me if I show sad or upset, to me, they’ve got the better of me.
Sarah: Who’s they?
Mandy: The system.
Sarah: Not the other prisoners?
Mandy: No.
Sarah: But the officers and the whole authority system?
Mandy: The whole system, yeah.
Sarah: That makes sense, and it’s not the first time I’ve heard that from people.
Mandy: Well, ‘cos to me it’s like they want to make sure they break you before you go . . . So I give these people a, pffff, ‘I don’t care’ attitude, like ‘Whatever, put it on my list, if I’ve got time, I’ll read it.’

This seemed to contradict her previous statements about only being able to show happy or sad. In this passage, she suggests that she did not show any emotion at all to staff and retained an outward image of calm, more like Geese Theatre Company’s “Mr Cool” mask (Baim et al., 2002, pp. 184-185). A little further along in the interview, I asked her what the benefit was to her of expressing different emotions:

Mandy: It feels good because it reminds me I am human. I’m not prison property like they carry on. And I don’t have to ask to think of something.
Sarah: What do you mean?
Mandy: Well the only thing you don’t get told what to do here is when you can go to the toilet. Everything’s structured, so you don’t have to think, you’re just a robot zzzz.
Sarah: And so that was different in the drama workshop?
Mandy: Yeah. (II 2)

In our follow up session six months after the program, we were discussing the idea that in the drama program, people could think and act differently, and Mandy again brought up the idea of two emotions: “And also you get to use different emotions instead of just two – happy or angry” (GI 4). I then went on to ask about the terms that were used to describe how people had to be in prison:
Sarah: So this 'bound-up prison person' – that's the words that Gwen used. You used the word 'robot' [to Mandy]. What else can describe what kind of person you almost have to become in here?

Mandy: Non-thinking, non-emotional. (GI 4)

This was when she went on to describe “bare minimum”.

Underscoring these descriptions of running on bare minimum, the robot and the stony face is the idea that Mandy was not only physically bound up, but emotionally as well. Her continual reference to the happy/sad, happy/angry binary is an interesting reflection of the classic image of the comedic/tragic theatre masks, an image that she seemed to recognise as somehow impoverished in contrast to the range and nuances that can exist between them. Mandy’s discussion about potentially being broken by the system if she showed her vulnerability was a common thread for her, and one that I have heard many times in other prison settings. The Education Officers Helen and Nancy acknowledged that Mandy was “institutionalised” and had closed down in terms of her dealings with staff (SI 1), and after a few weeks of debriefs in which I described the positive contribution that Mandy was making in the drama program, Helen commented,

The person you paint is in marked contrast to the person we've been involved with for a number of years. And she was always quite sullen, quite withdrawn, kept her own small group of friends and monosyllabic . . . . She’s just getting through here day to day. (Helen, SI 1)

Similarly, Gwen suggested that Mandy was trying to be “the strong silent type to get respect,” and that this was not necessarily how one needed to behave in jail. She said that people like Mandy “close down on themselves” and that this was a sad thing (Gwen, II 2). As I have discussed in Chapter 4, Mandy herself suggested that part of this survival strategy involved playing the game and conforming to the expectations of officers, something that both Rachel and Gwen also discussed in our follow up session (GI 4).

The image of an emotionless robot, playing the game, going through the structured day of the prison again bears out Easteal’s (2001) observations about the silence and emotional repression that characterises the dysfunctional culture of women’s prisons in Australia, a phenomenon that was further articulated by the Education Officer Helen, when I mentioned Mandy’s observations about emotional expression:
One of the problems with any person that's incarcerated is their institutionalisation, and they become institutionalised very quickly, and they need to survive... Mandy's more long-term, and therefore those issues are going to be a lot more ingrained. In terms of, you have to behave a certain way to staff, you have to behave a certain way to the people in your unit, you have to be very careful about what you say, to whom you say it. Anything that leaves you vulnerable – and you can be vulnerable to bullying, you can be vulnerable to breaches, you can be vulnerable to being used by other offenders – so you have to tread a very very careful line, which is why people like Mandy have a very very small group of people with whom they can feel comfortable and express their emotions... One of the first lessons they learn is don't talk. And if you do, learn exactly what subjects you can talk about and to whom you can talk to them. (Helen, SI 2)

The survival behaviour that Helen describes here (and is echoed by Easteal) was not limited to interactions with staff, but also other prisoners. It pervades the whole culture of the institution, and as Easteal suggests, it may come from ingrained survival strategies that the women learned as children. Mandy herself alluded to the power of emotional expression to remind her she was human, and renewal in this sense is therefore suggestive of the somewhat under-explored humanising agenda in some prison theatre that I have described in Chapter 2 (see Allen, Shaw, & Hall, 2004; Balfour, 2004; Buell, 2011; Heritage, 1998; McAvinney, 2011; McCabe-Juhnke, 2011; O'Connor & Mullen, 2011; Shailor, 2011, pp. 17-32), where the arts serve to combat the institutionalised alienation of the prison environment and return participants to a sense of their own and others’ humanity. In this section, I have devoted some space to understanding Mandy’s particular version of the bound-up prison person and her apparently unfolding interest in emotion, but the question remains as to how and where in Living Stories Mandy may have experienced the kind of emotional engagement and expansion that had this humanising potential.

Improvisation, Spontaneity and Emotion

Mandy’s observation that drama could provide opportunities for emotional expansion was often expressed along side the idea that the drama was also spontaneous, and although she did not herself explicitly make the link between the two, it appears that these were the two key areas in which she felt the drama was offering her something new. When I first asked the group whether they felt different in the drama workshop as opposed to other activities in the centre, Mandy replied, “It’s spontaneous. We’re in a
structured day every day. I know what I'm doing when I wake up to when I go to sleep. And what that whole day involves” (Mandy, GI 1). In our first one-to-one interview, she suggested that the other programs and courses were similarly “repetitive” and “monotonous” (Mandy, II 1). She observed that it was different for her to “do your actions before your thinking” and when I asked her what she was learning from the drama, she said, “To do before I think, otherwise it’s too late” (II 1). At the end of the program in our presentation debrief, I asked what it had been like to devise original material. Mandy replied, “It gets you thinking, ‘cos you don’t think much [in jail] really” (GI 3). As I have discussed in previous chapters, improvisation formed a significant part of the process in Living Stories, through the improvisation games and exercises that we did, in unrehearsed readings and responses to texts and through devising our final presentation about Inspiring Women from History. In the passages above, Mandy first describes the “doing before thinking” in drama, and then the idea that the devising process “gets you thinking;” with both being different from the predictable structure and repetition of life in the prison and in other programs. In this, Mandy echoes some of the other women’s observations about how drama encouraged them to think and problem solve differently. As I have discussed in previous chapters, spontaneity in improvisation involves the integration of emotion with judgement, and habit with innovation in an absorbing somatic, and potentially somaesthetic sense - a key element of applied theatre as an art of process (see Dewey, 1934; Fesmire, 2003; Granger, 2001, 2010; Nohl, 2009; O’Neill, 1995; Sawyer, 2000; Shusterman, 2000a, 2009a, 2011a; Taylor & Warner, 2006). I have explored the possibility in Chapter 4, that where Mandy and the others described thinking differently, they may have been referring to an embodied and integrative process of both thinking and feeling.

Habit and safe spontaneity

Despite Mandy’s stony face, lack of physical expression (or exertion) and apparent disinterest in the early sessions of Living Stories, there were moments in which it was clear that she had a talent for spontaneous, humorous responses in improvisation games and exercises, delivered in a dry and witty style. While there are no specific documented examples of this, I recall that early on this was one of the few things that told me that she was actually interested in the drama. This talent of hers carried through into a particular moment in Session 6, where she was reading the part of Joan Noakes in Vinegar Tom (Churchill, 1985). I had divided the group into pairs and threes to read excerpts of text, and we had gone through the reading once sitting down, when I then gave the women about ten minutes to go away and block their scene with movement.

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While the scene was scripted, there was little time for rehearsal, and I would therefore suggest that a certain amount of spontaneity existed in how the scenes were then performed. My journal from that session describes Mandy's performance:

Begging Margery for some yeast, and then cursing her for not giving it to her — Mandy played [Joan Noakes] with her sardonic, understated, yet hilarious sense of humour to the fore. No over-acting, just an instinctive ear for subtle comedy. She brought a broad Australian accent to the character, whom I could easily have imagined in a rural Australian setting. Karen stayed seated during this scene, whilst Mandy paced around her — and even this staging (which I think came from Karen's reluctance to stand up and move) worked well. (J 6)

As audience members, I recall that we all found the scene hilarious and laughed loudly in response. I had the sense that Mandy was primarily playing for laughs, and had an innate sense of comic timing, as well as an awareness of the comic effect that her deadpan delivery would have on the scene. Watching her was like watching a comedian play a role, rather than a serious actor. The audience laughs at the aspects of the comedian that we enjoy already, and how they integrate this with the role they are taking. These skills certainly paid off in making the group laugh, and I would suggest that this may have elicited positive forms of affect for her associated with playfulness, reward, satisfaction and possibly even success or mastery. In this and other spontaneous moments of humour, Mandy would have been engaging in the integration between emotion and judgement as she developed her responses to the situation, with the "searchlight" of emotion (Carroll, 1997, p. 201) seeking out that which she judged as amusing. I suspect that this was known territory for Mandy, that she was employing a safe form of spontaneity that she knew would elicit a laugh, but that was not necessarily risky for her: paradoxically, a habitual form of spontaneity that one might assume is common to those with strong comedic skills.

In other early improvisations and games, Mandy appeared to be drawn to narratives that reflected criminality and jail culture. In the game The Wind Takes Away, where participants must take turns in the centre of the circle and share a fact about themselves to see if it is shared by others, Mandy said, "The wind takes away anyone who stands staunch?" When I asked what this meant, she replied, "Anyone who is not a dog;" meaning, anyone who is not an informant (R 15). In Session 3, we were playing the game Change the Image, a Geese adaption of a Boal (2002) exercise (Complete the Image) in which, two at a time, participants must create and alter images using their bodies, while the rest of the group interprets these (p. 139). In our discussions, Mandy
came up with a crime or violence related interpretation for almost every image in this exercise, and in my journal I also noted that she resorted to similar narratives during Bus Stop, the popular improvisation game in which one person must persuade another to leave the bus stop without touching them (J 3). In the improvisation exercise News Report, which I have described in the previous chapter, Mandy suggested that we create a news item about an armed diamond heist. As the news anchor, I tried to make light of the scenario by describing how the robber had used a pump-action water pistol to do the heist. Mandy was in role as the witness, but instead of being the kind of witness one normally sees on television – describing the events in excited detail – I noted in my journal that Mandy was tight-lipped about what she had seen, putting herself in the position of a conspirator and not willing to be a “dog” (J 7). Mandy’s spontaneous responses in these moments appeared to also demonstrate habits that reflected the culture of the institution, and the role she saw herself playing within it. While they were successful in terms of responding to the task, and perhaps engaging the other women, they also somehow appeared to be safe for her: In her responses, there was no risk of exposing herself as anything other than a staunch criminal.

During our first one-to-one interview, Mandy said she found “improvisation and Spacejump” as the most enjoyable and satisfying exercises so far. When I asked why, she said, “It’s not the norm that you’ve just got to suddenly become another person or character” (Mandy, II 1). But going into all of the roles I have described so far, Mandy demonstrated little to no physical or vocal variation from her usual persona outside the artistic frame, and she maintained the lack of physical and facial expressiveness that I have described in the previous section. In the case of Joan Noakes, this was juxtaposed against the heightened historical language of the text to great effect. But her responses appeared to come from a place of safety, not only within the safe narratives of the jail culture, but also from underneath her physical and emotional binding. I would suggest therefore that in order to respond spontaneously within the new situation of the drama workshop context, in the early stages at least, Mandy was relying heavily on habitual behaviours and narratives. Yet Mandy was being offered a space in which to begin experimenting with these habits, and to exercise and celebrate her verbal wit. This may have generated positive forms of affect for her, which in turn, may have contributed to the growing sense of emotional expansion and commitment to the process that I saw in her as the program progressed.
Habit and risk

In our reflections after Session 9, Mandy stated, "It takes me a while to open up to people," and suggested that she was beginning to do so in the drama space (R 9), and I find it interesting that her awareness of emotional expansion appeared to move alongside this opening up and feeling comfortable with the group. Feeling a sense of trust and safety within the group may give participants the confidence to take creative risks: to revise habits in the spontaneity of the moment towards innovation; but I feel it is interesting to consider what this rhythm between habit and risk, or habit and innovation looks like in practice, and how this aspect of the art of process connects with emotion and renewal. As Living Stories progressed, I noticed that Mandy appeared to begin moving away from the habits of safe spontaneity described above and taking more risks. In Session 14, during a second run of the Queen Game, I noted that Mandy's approach had changed, and that she "got much more into it" (R 14). Here I was referring to changes particularly in her voice and face to become more queenly. This was the first point at which I noticed her become more committed to a role somatically in improvisation, using more than just her verbal wit and deadpan delivery to get a laugh. A few sessions later in Session 17, I introduced the improvisation game Occupation Endowments as described in Chapter 6. During this exercise, I noted that Mandy in particular improvised well, first as the manager of a hairdressing salon, and then in role as a dentist:

Mandy tied a jumper around her neck backwards, to indicate a smock, and put a piece of paper under Cassie's chin – it was a great bit of impromptu costuming that told the story really well. Mandy then proceeded to subject Cassie to a painful treatment with no anaesthetic. Gwen was in the waiting room as Cassie screamed and begged for mercy. (R 17)

In each of these examples, Mandy had begun to subtly differentiate between the roles she was playing, and demonstrate more facial openness and expressiveness than she had previously. She appeared to be committing more to the roles, and moving further away from the habits of criminal narrative and somatic binding. In the case of Occupation Endowments, the scenes created reflected the inherent narrative structure that O'Neill (1995) suggests exists in effective improvisations that are satisfying for audiences and players alike. The group was working effectively, using emotion to guide their collaborative structuring of these narratives, and were engaged in a spontaneous moment of ethical co-creation that I have established as being key to drama-based improvisation (see Fesmire, 2003; Johnstone, 1999, 2007). The emotional implications
for Mandy of these quite short episodes may therefore have been multifaceted: emotional expression and representation through increased somatic expressiveness in role; emotion guiding the collaborative construction of narrative; and positive affect accompanying the satisfying outcomes and ethical consequences of her own and others’ spontaneous contributions to the collaborative process. I would suggest that these positive forms of emotion might, in turn, have contributed to Mandy’s sense of emotional expansion, and increasing commitment to the process.

By Sessions 19 and 20, we had begun working on the *Inspiring Women from History* performance and were devising Tina’s scenes about Anne Frank. When I suggested that the group playing Anne Frank’s family do their daily routine in wind-up toy style, Mandy, as Anne Frank’s uncle, took the lead and was the only one who seemed able to respond to my direction, moving about in jerky, robotic style (J 19; J 20). Again, she was physically committing more than she had in previous sessions, although it is interesting to consider that perhaps the task of improvising a performance of routine in robotic style was not such a great leap for Mandy, given how she described her experience of being in jail. During the devising of the Rosa Parks scene, when I asked a group to take on roles as other people on the bus, Mandy immediately created a role for herself as Rosa’s ally, and played the role with a strong, determined supportiveness, defending her in the face of prejudice from the driver and other passengers (J 20). As I have described in previous chapters, the kind of role taking that Living Stories invited participants to undertake was variable, moving on a kind of continuum between the most “illustrative” (O’Neill, 1995, p. 69) versions of role that are functional responses to the unfolding action of an improvisation; and more sophisticated, skilled forms of characterisation that are pursued in the realisation of a theatrical performance (see also G. M. Bolton, 1984; Morgan & Saxton, 1989; O’Toole, 1992). I have suggested that the length and depth of the program did not enable us to fully explore the more complex nuances of characterisation, and that for the most part, a functional form of role-play prevailed. In this performance, Mandy did not seem to stretch herself in terms of her physical or vocal expressiveness but seemed very much like herself, using role in an illustrative way to respond to the unfolding scene. The emotional flavour of this performance was, however, empathic and compassionate, traits that I had begun noticing Mandy express in her supportiveness and protectiveness towards the other women, particularly Tina (S 22; J 22), but had not seen in our earlier improvisations and interactions. In this scene, Mandy was possibly drawing on aspects of her own emotional life and bringing them to bear on her role as Rosa’s ally; there was a place for these to be expressed and
represented so that they contributed to the narrative and emotional intentions of the scene. I wonder whether the Rosa Parks narrative provided one of the first opportunities for Mandy to spontaneously show this softer side of herself, and whether this was similarly a result of her softening as the program progressed.

“Mary Chose Me”

In the previous section, I have suggested that at least some of the time, Mandy had begun to stretch herself away from her usual narrative and performative habits, towards more somatically and emotionally nuanced versions of spontaneity in improvisation. Yet I would suggest that this rhythm between habit and innovation continued to unfold helically, as she moved between self and role, towards emotional expansion, unbinding and thus renewal; and this rhythm became all the more evident in her interpretation of Mary McKillop’s story. In our first interview, I asked Mandy whether there were any female historical figures that interested her. “This sounds soft,” she replied, “But Mother Theresa, Amelia Earhart and Mary McKillop and Mary Queen of Scots” (II 1). I would suggest that Mandy’s slight embarrassment at sounding “soft” was another small signifier of her emotional binding. I included these figures in the selection of Inspiring Women from History that I offered to the group in Session 17. Mandy chose Mary McKillop, and when it was her turn to explain her choice, she said, “Mary chose me.” I asked her why and she replied, “Because she’s the saint of Australia. If I was around in that time, I probably would have helped her out” (R 17). Mandy then went on to say that she was attracted to the fact that she took a vow of poverty, and that she dedicated herself to providing education for poor kids so they would have a better life. She said an interesting scene could be her excommunication from the church. The qualities that she identified in Mary McKillop from the image were that she looked “tired”, she looked like “a beautiful human”, she “believed in the Lord,” and she “didn’t gain or benefit for herself” in all the work she did (R 17). The statement, “Mary chose me” signifies a strong connection to Mary McKillop’s story. Certain aspects of McKillop’s story that I had printed on the back of the image seemed to capture Mandy straight away. The idea of Mary McKillop providing education to poor children was something that Mandy continued to strongly reiterate throughout all of her improvisations and discussions about the role, which I will discuss further below.

The theoretical position that I have established through previous chapters leads me to suggest that emotion drove Mandy’s connection with Mary McKillop’s story (see Carroll, 1997; Goldie, 2012), and this emotional engagement coincided with her
increasing commitment to the process of Living Stories and her sense of emotional unbinding. It therefore becomes a chicken and egg argument as to whether her emotional engagement increased as a result of her connection to the Mary McKillop story, or whether her increased commitment to the process facilitated a stronger connection to the story than it would have in earlier sessions. Or perhaps it was a little of both. In any case, I had the sense that Mandy was already drawn to historical narratives in which there was a sense of resistance and rebellion, and that her connection to these narratives formed a significant part of her poetics of self-creation.

At the end of Session 6, when we had been working with the *Vinegar Tom* (Churchill, 1985) texts, I asked the group about any themes that they would like to explore, what stories they would like to tell, or what message they would like to send in the final presentation. Mandy proclaimed, “When injustice becomes law, defiance becomes our duty”. I asked her what this meant, and she said it was a quote from Ned Kelly¹ (S 6). She then went on to suggest that we make a scene depicting the bank robbery by the Kelly Gang, where they took all of the pastoral leases and destroyed them as a protest against the wealthy squatters (J 6). During one of our earlier post-session conversations, Mandy and I had a discussion about Nelson Mandela, with Mandy describing how she had been reading his autobiography, *Long Walk to Freedom* (Mandela, 1994), and was inspired by his resistance to Apartheid in South Africa. In approaching Mary McKillop’s story, Mandy seemed very interested in the idea that she went against the established hierarchy of the church, took a vow of poverty and was excommunicated, and these were aspects of the story that she wanted to depict in the final presentation (J 19). In this way, Mary McKillop’s story may have in some ways conformed to Mandy’s usual narrative preferences: the searchlight may have sought aspects of Mary McKillop’s life narrative that was satisfying to Mandy in terms of her habitual taste for resistance or rebellion against an established power. It seems likely that an attraction to these kinds of narratives may not be uncommon in a prison context, where they might facilitate a sense of empowerment in the face of institutionalised oppression; particularly in the case of Ned Kelly, whose story often walks a contentious line between heroic rebellion and criminality.

In our first attempt at improvising the Mary McKillop story in Session 19, we were working on the scene where Mary takes her vow of poverty, and I suggested that we begin with a semi-naturalistic approach as an accessible way of beginning the

¹ A version of this statement is actually attributed to Thomas Jefferson
process. My journal from that session conveys just how impressed I was with Mandy’s spontaneous response:

At this point I’m absolutely kicking myself for not turning on the voice recorder because Mandy is such a fantastic improviser in this character of Mary – she was coming out with amazing dialogue, heartfelt and authentic, but still with Mandy’s individual stamp on it. (J 19)

Later I observed that Mandy was “blending what she thought should be a ‘holy’ vow-taking way of speaking, with her own vernacular” (J 19). In this episode, it appears that Mandy was again reverting to a safer, more functional option in her first spontaneous enactment of the role: she was still essentially Mandy, relying on the content of improvised text to convey a sense of authenticity in the performance, rather than a more somatic level of engagement. My response at the time suggests that this still worked on some level, that the text that Mandy generated was perhaps effective in taking us into the world of Mary McKillop, and that this combined with Mandy’s “individual stamp” was also engaging for me as a practitioner.

We then moved on to develop a scene where Mary would be teaching a group of small children:

Here, Mandy completely came into her own with the improvisation. . . . [She] invested the character with a beautiful earnestness and warmth. Her voice became slightly different – clearer and more defined, rather than her usual mumbling/droning. (J 19)

My observation that Mandy “completely came into her own” in this improvisation suggests that she was achieving a level of sophistication in role that I had not seen previously. This passage indicates Mandy’s progress towards a more somatic spontaneous engagement. Her voice had changed, and there was a sense that she was moving away from herself and the functional portrayal of Mary McKillop, and towards a stronger characterisation. In this performance, Mandy was communicating the feelings of Mary McKillop towards the children - earnestness and warmth, possibly with high levels of commitment and connection to the role and story (see Dunn, Bundy, & Stinson, 2015). Here, one might contemplate the emotional complexity that I have described in Chapter 2, where Mandy was objectively representing Mary’s emotions, while subjectively experiencing her own emotional state; a metaxic tension that G. M. Bolton (1984) describes as, “A struggle between what is privately felt and symbolically controlled” (p. 122), and that Blair (2006) describes the “multivalent network” between
mind, body, reason and emotion (p. 176). She may also have been experiencing a more reflective emotional response to the act of performance – the pleasure of playing as contained in Vygotsky's notion of “dual affect” (see G. M. Bolton, 1984 and O'Toole, 1992); and an objective awareness of the cultural meanings and significance of the emotions being represented in the context of the drama. In this integrative process, it may be possible that Mandy was also experiencing aesthetic emotion (Dewey, 1934), the vitality of which might also help her break through the emotional lock-down that she had been experiencing in jail and lead her to experience new forms of knowing.

Later still in Session 19, we came to the final section of the Mary McKillop scene where Mandy wished to address Mary's sainthood:

I suggested that Mandy finally stand on one of the footstools and address the audience from “beyond the grave” as Mary. Mandy again went into a great improvisational speech about her efforts, her doubters and then her sainthood. She again addressed the audience with the earnestness, but down to earth “Mandy-ness” that seems unavoidable and very charismatic. (J 19)

Once again, I refer here to the qualities that Mandy brought to the role of Mary McKillop that appeared somewhat inescapable in her performance: her “Mandy-ness”. The staging of the scene – a direct address to the audience from atop a footstool – was perhaps a factor in moving Mandy back towards a more functional form of role taking for this part of the performance. She was not required to interact with other characters or engage in much movement, it was rather a narration of historical events. Mandy again demonstrated a high level of ability to improvise the text, and the strong presence of her own personality in this address did not produce the same humorous effect that it had in her depiction of Joan Noakes in Vinegar Tom (Churchill, 1985). Instead, it seemed to heighten the authenticity of the message that Mandy was putting across via the figure of Mary McKillop: Mandy's own charisma as a person somehow made the speech more compelling to watch. She demonstrated these abilities in a similar way during the hot seat with the audience at the end of our final presentation. An audience member asked, “How did you keep going when you had a lot of men in opposition?” Mandy replied:

I just took it as a setback, but I didn't let it get in the way of my mission. My mission I've always strongly believed in is to educate the children. If we don't educate them, they'll stay in the cycle of poverty. (S 23)

I reflected on Mandy's performance several months after the final presentation:
As Mary McKillop, she was humble and self-effacing, yet determined and stoic. She still employed her broad Aussie accent, and did not adapt her own language to speak as Mary, but the character began to shine through her physicality – arms outstretched, embracing the children and the world; head bowing in humility as she asked for money; the slow deliberate walk of a woman on God’s mission. (CR 2)

The progression through the scenes described above reflects a swing between “Mandy-ness”, and Mary McKillop: between functional role taking, and a deeper, somatically engaged form of characterisation. Yet the question remains as to what emotional qualities existed for Mandy in these representations of Mary McKillop’s life and character. The idea that Mandy kept coming back to within her improvisations was the notion of “breaking the cycle of poverty” (a phrase that she used many times in conversation and rehearsal) and making sure that underprivileged children have an education. She appeared to make a strong connection to this aspect of Mary McKillop’s life narrative that we discussed on a number of occasions.

Sarah: In your Mary McKillop scene, I noticed you were particularly good when you were improvising that dialogue when you were teaching the kids – when you first came up with all of that – it’s like it all just came out. I’m wondering why you think that is?

Mandy: ‘Cos I believe in educating children too. You know what I mean, if you educate them, they can then choose the job that they want to do, instead of being told what job to do.

Sarah: So that was a part that you particularly connected with?

Mandy: Yeah because I always go on to the kids about education. You know what I mean? And it does, eventually the next generation somehow breaks a cycle.

Sarah: So is there a cycle in your life that you’d like your kids to break – in your family?

Mandy: Yeah, I don’t what them to become criminals or use drugs. (II 2)

Later in the interview, I asked whether playing Mary McKillop had had any impact on Mandy. She suggested again that she had made a strong connection to the idea of education, that playing the role had reinforced ideas that she had already held about its value in an intergenerational sense (II 2); and she reiterated this again in our group interview after the final rehearsal: “Education is freedom,” she said (GI 2). Mandy’s strong connection to the idea of educating children may have facilitated the more somatically engaged and emotionally charged improvisational performance that I
described in my journal excerpt earlier; and the potential for aesthetic emotion in that performance for Mandy may have, in turn, strengthened her connection to the narrative. I also wonder what impact it may have had on Mandy to know that her teenage daughter was, at the same time, engaged at school in drama exercises and activities that paralleled our own (S 14; GI 1; II 1). This too may have strengthened her emotional connection to this aspect of the Mary McKillop role and narrative.

In Session 19, we discussed the scenes that we had created for Mary McKillop, and I asked Mandy to reflect on how she was portraying the role. The other women contributed to the conversation, and a picture emerged of just how close the alignment was between Mandy and her character:

Mandy: Um... not fiery but, I dunno, and not stand-overish, but...
Emma: Determined...
Mandy: She gets things done.
Gwen: Obsequious but determined as required.
Mandy: Yeah.
Sarah: ‘Cos it’s great, the way you’re speaking is like she’s telling it like it is.
Mandy: Yeah.
Sarah: There’s no nonsense.
Mandy: Nup. And I don’t think there was with her – she was straight up.
Sarah: See so you’ve made her your own, which is fantastic. (S 19)

As my reactions suggest, the picture that was emerging of Mandy’s version of Mary McKillop strongly echoed the character of Mandy herself, which was also reminiscent of the way that Mandy later described herself in our second one-to-one interview. After our discussion about the survival strategy of remaining calm and not showing emotions in jail, she discussed the role that she usually played in her family, and also in the jail, as the “backbone” (SI 2). She explained that if someone came to her with a problem, she would keep it to herself, even if she was under pressure, and work out the best way to help them solve it: “I can get things done” she said (Mandy, II 2; see also GI 3). This description echoes of the staunchness that I have described previously as being key to Mandy’s role within the culture of the prison. It represents a double-edged sword in terms of her emotional binding and renewal. On the one hand, it could be perceived as loyalty and steadfastness, coupled with altruistic intent towards others. Mandy was able to bring these qualities to bear on her portrayal of Mary McKillop, and thus present an interpretation of the saintly character and her story that could certainly be perceived as accurate or believable. But on the other hand, it also formed part of the institutionaised,
emotionally bound survival role that Mandy performed in BWCC, where she presented herself as the strong, silent type who had closed down to staff and would not give anything away, but could “get things done.” Again, this points towards a habitual behaviour or role being brought to bear on a new situation (dramatic enactment of Mary McKillop’s story), which in turn leads to the expansion of the self (emotional unbinding). Perhaps by anchoring her portrayal of Mary McKillop within qualities that were recognisable and safe for Mandy, and spontaneously experimenting with these in the emotionally engaging fictional narrative frame of Mary McKillop’s life, Mandy was at times able to express and represent emotion in new ways. Her habitual role may have also been “unbound” from its usual narrative context of her own family, or her family within the jail.

For a few moments, Mandy was able to stand in front of an audience, remove at least some of her emotional binding, and communicate beliefs she herself held through the role of Mary McKillop. She made choices about what aspects of McKillop’s life she wished to represent; she translated McKillop’s ideas and story into her own words; she infused McKillop’s character with aspects of her own; and in some moments, she appeared somatically, possibly somaesthetically engaged in the performance of Mary McKillop’s story. This could arguably have more power for Mandy (and her audience) than simply stating, “I want a better life for my children.” As the artist in this process, there were compelling rhythms occurring between Mandy’s self-narrative, her self-image and her own emotional life, and those present in her representation of Mary McKillop as a historical figure: the integration between self and role that contributes to aesthetic engagement in applied theatre, and underpins the arts of process and participation.

**Emotional Unbinding and Renewal**

In order to explore the nature of emotion and the potential for unbinding and renewal in Mandy’s story, I feel the need to momentarily return to the idea of spontaneity, and my observation that Mandy appeared to engage much more strongly, and create much more compelling performance in moments of spontaneity than those that were structured or rehearsed. On the first day we devised her scene where she was educating the children, as I have described previously in the chapter, her improvisation had been powerful and engaging to watch. She asked me to write down what she had said so that she would remember it later. After writing it down, and in subsequent rehearsals and the final performance, Mandy never quite captured the same vocally and physically expressive emotional qualities of this improvisation. The same thing occurred in Session
21, when I gave Mandy a kind of script guideline for her role of MC for the final performance. In the first rehearsal, she struggled a great deal with the script and it seemed to be restricting her. In the next session, I took away the script and just gave her the running order, after which she did much better (J 22). In the actual performance, she struggled at the start in her MC role, but later warmed into it. She was able to make the audience roar with laughter with some of her witty comments (S 23). My measure of Mandy's success in these spontaneous moments is highly subjective, but it suggests that she appeared to be present in the moment, transmitting the nuances and emotions of the scene in the former instance, and using her habitual humorous form of spontaneity for improvising and interacting with the audience in the risky performance context of the latter. In both instances, she appeared more alive and somatically (perhaps somaesthetically) engaged.

I have already explored the emotional implications of spontaneity for Mandy, and the different rhythms of habit and innovation that may have been operating during her spontaneous responses in improvisation. But spontaneity itself appeared to be another double-edged sword for Mandy. I was asking her how her first session of the Making Choices offending behaviour program (see Heseltine, Day, & Sarre, 2011; Queensland Corrective Services, 2009a) had gone, and she explained:

I'm going to work out, hopefully, this roadmap will show me why I think impulsive and act impulsive. Why I don't really think a lot of things through properly when I already know the answer and the consequences, but still go (makes a gesture to signal rushing in). And it's not normal. (Mandy, GI 3)

On the one hand she had suggested that the drama was teaching her to be spontaneous, to “do before thinking” as I have described earlier, but on the other hand, she observed that doing before thinking was what got her into trouble in a criminal sense. I have speculated that her observation about learning how to “do before thinking” and “think differently” in the drama may have been unwitting descriptions of the integration of thinking and feeling that occurs in aesthetic engagement and drama (see Abbs, 1989; Best, 1992; G. M. Bolton, 1984; Bruner, 1986; Bundy, 2003a, 2003b; Courtney, 1995; Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1995; A. Jackson, 2005; Johnson, 2007; Taylor & Warner, 2006; Witkin, 1974). But this apparent contradiction throws up a number of other possibilities. Mandy may have been referring to the contrast between the spontaneity of the drama with the structure of the jail, in which case the drama workshop might remind her of the freedom, risk and somaesthetic engagement that she also felt in committing crime. While there may be a different pay off with drama, it may possibly
elicit similar affective responses and emotions to committing crime. On the other hand, the contradiction might suggest that Mandy perceived a difference between the spontaneous response in drama and that which she used in her criminal behaviour: a difference in how the process occurs, or a qualitative difference in the outcomes. In this case, she may have learned to use her spontaneity to more positive effect (and affect) in the creative process than in her acts of criminality. Improvisation may have therefore taught her a positive way to engage in a habitual behaviour. With the position that I have taken throughout this study, the concept of renewal is not dependent on whether or not a participant will continue to engage in criminal behaviour after the drama program is finished, yet I find this an interesting thread in Mandy’s story of emotional engagement and potential undbinding.

Mandy said that she became more focused and committed to the program when we fixed upon the theme and structure for the final presentation (GI 3). But, as I describe earlier in the chapter, I observed an increased commitment in Mandy from around Session 9, with this sometimes (but not always) manifesting in the increased somatic and vocal expressiveness of her performances in improvisation. In addition to this change, Mandy’s high level of commitment became apparent in other ways. She became more supportive of other group members and energetically contributed to the devising of their scenes, playing a multitude of roles (S 19; J 19; J 20); she rushed around arranging props and assisting me to carry workshop materials back to the office (J 22); she wholeheartedly engaged in physical and vocal warm-ups, at one point bellowing out a line of dialogue with gusto (J 20); and she volunteered for the role of MC for the final presentation without any hesitation. In Session 21, she even took charge straight after our check-in saying, “Right well, I think we should do a quick warm-up, then get into the Rosa Parks scene and then Gwen’s scene” (R 21). When I drew the group’s attention to Mandy’s increased commitment over the course of the program, Emma replied, “She’s trying to be the backbone – she’s got to be the backbone of the group, keep it together, you know?” (GI 3), again invoking the role that I have described earlier in relation to Mandy’s own character, and her depiction of Mary McKillop as someone who keeps things together and “gets things done”. All of this behaviour was certainly a far cry from Mandy’s earlier minimalism; and it appeared to be in stark contrast to how she had initially been described to me by the Education Officers: as “damaged goods”, and their suggestion that it was nearly impossible to keep her in a program. After only seven sessions, they had said it was a “major step” for her to consistently commit to the drama (J 7). I asked the group to give me their thoughts on whether we could have
begun working towards our final presentation any sooner. They all agreed that it would not have been possible. Emma said that we needed to develop acting skills; Gwen said that they needed to get to know the rules and get a core group to commit; and Mandy said that they had to get confident enough to “break down our walls that we have” (GI 3).

This increased level of commitment not only appeared to occur along side Mandy’s emotional unbinding – the breaking down of her walls, but it also appeared to mark Living Stories as an experience that was itself a source of positive affect in the form of satisfaction, “eminence” (Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006) and achievement. During our debrief after the presentation, Emma was explaining that performing their own devised material had made her more nervous because it was more exposing than doing a pre-written script. Gwen said that this gave them a sense of responsibility, and Mandy said, “It becomes a passion.”

“In what way?” I asked.

“To do it well,” she replied (GI 3). In my second interview with Helen after the final presentation, she observed the change that she saw in Mandy: “I saw a completely different side of her personality – the fact that she was fun, she was inventive, she was articulate and that she was passionate” (SI 2). I find it interesting that Helen picked up the emotion of passion here as well. The act of Mandy communicating this passion to the audience had potential for renewal in both a personal and cultural sense. It affected Helen’s perception of Mandy, and therefore may in turn impact on their future interactions and relationships. Here, she was not only seeing Mandy in a new light as far as the role she habitually performed within the prison, or seeing her demonstrate new skills in performance, but she was also engaging aesthetically with Mandy’s passion.

**Conclusion**

Emotion is a vital element of all aesthetic experience, and is therefore vital to the personal and cultural renewal that occurs in the creative process. With Mandy’s prompting, I have deliberately picked out emotion as the key melody in her song. The episodes described in this chapter point to the idea that Mandy was becoming more somatically, and within this, emotionally unbound as Living Stories progressed, which in turn may have allowed her to take further risks in performance, and therefore experience further unbinding. This reflects Dewey’s (1934) description of a fundamental rhythm between doing and undergoing that I have used to signify applied theatre as an art of process. Mandy excelled at improvisation, demonstrating the integration between
habit and innovation in her safe versions of spontaneous humour, and the riskier spontaneous responses that began to challenge her bound-up role within the institution; yet they may have also harkened back to the feelings that were touched off through her impulsive criminal behaviour. The movement between safety and risk therefore embodied the same quality of complexity as it made its outward expansion towards renewal. As I have explored in previous chapters, emotion acts as the qualitative searchlight (Carroll, 1997, p. 201) that informs and colours our responses to the self-world interaction (the art of participation), and informs any objective, structural endeavour that outwardly expresses this interaction, including for example, narrative and role in improvisation. Performing a role, in either the artistic or actual frame, is a form of self- and world-making, just as any other act of outward expressiveness may be also. I have drawn on a number of theorists to suggest that the rhythm between self and role that forms part of the state of metaxis contains emotional qualities that are integrated in an embodied sense, with reason and judgement to achieve an aesthetic outcome (see Blair, 2006, 2009; Boal, 1995; G. M. Bolton, 1984, 1985; Courtney, 1995; Hurley, 2010; Johnson, 2007; Linds, 2006; O’Neill, 1995; O’Toole, 1992). Mandy’s choices in the spontaneous moments described in this chapter were therefore functions of her emotional responses to the unfolding moment, but they also had their own emotional qualities as outward expressions and representations of both self and role.

Emotion drew Mandy to certain narratives of resistance and rebellion, and to certain aspects of Mary McKillop’s life narrative: her rebellion against the church, her commitment to educating disadvantaged children. Mandy’s performance of the Mary McKillop role at times contained and conveyed emotional qualities such as compassion and love — emotions that found a life within Mandy as she represented the role; or found a life within the role as Mandy brought them forth from within herself. Or both. Mandy may further have experienced positive affect in the moment of successfully representing the role of Mary McKillop (and Mary’s emotions) to her audience. She may also have been experiencing the feeling of “eminence” that accompanied being part of the process (Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006). While it is impossible to know whether Mandy experienced aesthetic emotion (Dewey, 1934), this would manifest as an elevated form of the integrative thinking/feeling that emerged from perceiving the qualitative unity in her performance of the role; it would lead to Mandy developing new forms of knowing about herself and her world. Mandy did not necessarily convey this level of complexity in describing emotion in Living Stories, however I would suggest that her observation that drama could move her beyond the binaries of happy/sad or
happy/angry in terms of emotional expressiveness may have been inherently informed by this complexity. Both in my previous work with Geese (see Baim et al., 2002), and my conversations with Nikki the Intern Psychologist at BWCC (SI 2), there was an acknowledgement that arts-based processes are able to improve people’s emotional literacy (through identifying and naming emotions), and increase their capacity for emotional regulation (through the rehearsal of challenging scenarios). This idea of experiencing emotional complexity through drama moves beyond the instrumental goals of developing emotional literacy or regulation, and into an integrative aesthetic realm that informs the poetics of self-creation. This may therefore have been a significant aspect of the process of renewal for Mandy, which manifested visibly as an increased somatic expressiveness and emotional unbinding, and a demonstrated passion and commitment to our shared endeavour. As I have suggested, in terms of Shusterman’s (2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012) someaesthetics in Chapter 2, this somatic experience of emotional complexity might form an integral part of the somaesthetic potential of applied theatre as an art of living.

As a brief epilogue to this story, Mandy was in the audience for a second performance that I undertook in BWCC, two years after Living Stories. When I asked her what she thought of this new piece that we had created with a new group of women (which explored the history of women prisoners from convict days to the present), Mandy said that she enjoyed it very much, specifically noting that it was “deeper” and “more emotional.”
Chapter 9. Living Stories as Knowing: A conclusion

Introduction

The Living Stories program has been used in this thesis as the basis for investigating how applied theatre can operate as an art of living within a prison context. One of my key methodological concerns for the study has been to find a way of integrating the aesthetic with the instrumental, rather than importing models from outside the art form of drama to analyse and describe its transformative or ameliorative potentials. I believe that this in itself represents an original contribution to the field. As the title of the thesis suggests, a significant aspect of this has been to introduce and explore the notion of renewal in the context of the program. Renewal is seen as a poetic (and at times aesthetic) term that describes the rhythmic expansion of self and world through the creative process in both art-centred and ordinary experience. The intentional pursuit of renewal is seen as a key aspect of the applied in applied theatre, positioning it as an art of living. Yet I have also argued that the concept should not become a handy replacement for terms such as transformation or rehabilitation, where the dynamic flow of aesthetic experience risks becoming dammed up into a stagnant pool of instrumentalism. Renewal is a complex term that can accommodate the beautiful disturbance, disharmony and disorder in self- and world-creation, as much as its harmony and order. It can take shape over a whole life span, or in a single moment or anywhere in between. I have also hopefully demonstrated that renewal is a fluid term that can be defined and articulated from within the creative process. In order to investigate Living Stories as an example of the art of living, I have therefore attempted to address a research question that reflects the complexity of renewal, but which resists the temptation to treat it as an instrumental yardstick against which to measure every aspect of the process: In Living Stories, what was the nature of the women’s engagement, and the potential for movement towards personal and cultural renewal?

Within this overarching question, I have explored a number of other areas. I have identified and investigated the operation of three additional key principles that inform the art of living. The art of participation has been positioned as the egalitarian, collaborative and dialectical making of selves and worlds within the artistic process that reflects (and in some cases elevates) the self-world rhythm. As such, I have investigated the poetics of self- and world-creation and renewal in the actual and artistic frames of Living Stories. The art of process represents the objective structural elements and embodied modes of expression that underpin this self- and world-making. As such, I
have specifically explored how the women engaged with emotion, spontaneity, narrative and role, and how these informed the embodied poetics of self- and world-creation and renewal. As an extension to this, I have discovered that certain bound-up roles and habitual narratives existed in the actual frame of the prison and the women’s lives, which informed their engagement in the artistic frame. As such, I have explored how these habits might have impacted on the process, and whether there was movement towards unbinding, innovation and renewal. The art of knowing is the fourth principle that I have explored within this study, which describes how the process of making in applied theatre, and structural modes of expression such as role and narrative, can give rise to new meanings and therefore knowledge about self and world. Meaning is seen to emerge from the integration of the rhythms that drive the songs of experience and give them dynamic form, some of these reflecting the concept of metaxis (Allern, 2001; Boal, 1995; G. M. Bolton, 1984; Linds, 2006; O’Neill, 1995; O’Toole, 1992): self-world, subject-object, means-ends, disturbance-harmony, surrender-reflection, habit-innovation, doing-undergoing, actual-artistic, fictional-factual – all operating within the meta-rhythm between life and art. These are the key tensions and rhythms that underpinned the dynamic flow of Living Stories. Following the pragmatic orientation of the key theorists that have informed my study, I have endeavoured to test these ideas, “In the crucible of lived experience” (Granger, 2006, p. 91). The art of knowing thus also informs the study of Living Stories as an experience (Dewey, 1934) – drawing the theory into the flow of the practice, and vice versa. As such, the thesis does not neatly delineate between analysis, findings, discussion and conclusions, but rather describes the unfolding participation, process and knowing within my experience. This chapter represents a summative account of that knowing, and highlights some areas of significance and recommendations for further exploration and development within my own and others’ applied theatre practice.

The Poetics of Self-Creation and Renewal

Throughout the previous chapters, I have explored the art of participation as an ever-expanding horizon arising from the interaction between self and world, an oscillation or rhythm between habit and innovation via spontaneity, in which both self and world may experience renewal. Renewal lives within the art of process – the rhythm between doing and undergoing, subject and object, means and ends – in both art-centred and ordinary aesthetic experience. Intentionally cultivating this renewal through aesthetic (and somaesthetic) practices is therefore seen as the art of living. I have hopefully demonstrated the complexity and nuances of renewal in the previous case stories, and
will summarise some of my discoveries in detail here. Several of the women who participated in Living Stories articulated a desire for personal renewal: to live better lives, to become better people, and in Gwen's case, to be seen as a better person by others. I discovered early on that this was a subjective endeavour that varied from woman to woman, and quite often involved rejecting institutional versions of these ideals. Living Stories may have been useful in finding different means for accessing and articulating individual versions of personal renewal and in some cases potentially clarifying and reinforcing them. As I shifted my focus towards engaging participants as artists rather than offenders – themselves examples of role operating in the actual frame – this appeared to change the complex rhythms at play, and the potential for personal renewal. Through both process and content, Living Stories appeared to be a way of exploring and enacting ethical participation without limiting the women to a narrow version of what this may be. Of course the versions that they did explore were regulated by my offers, responses and choices as a facilitator and the questions that I posed in reflection. Although I have attempted to bring the women's own versions of renewal to the fore, my retrospective reading of the data has meant that the concept has been explored primarily through my own interpretation.

In Chapter 4, I have introduced the idea that renewal itself might be storied in certain ways within the environment of the prison. There was a sense that the women were suspicious of institutional forms of renewal that were being proposed within the context of the criminogenic rehabilitation programs; and the notion that prison as putting life on hold or being like groundhog day had particular implications for the idea of renewal. Through the critical incident of Session 2 (Chapter 5), I have demonstrated how the permeable boundary between the sanctuary of the workshop space and the environment of the prison had an impact on the potential for renewal. Renewal was possibly thwarted by the habits and bound-up roles that Lola and I reverted to in the new and unsteady context of the drama workshop. I presented a risky set of activities that operated in the actual/factual realm, rather than offering the distance of fiction, and this likely decreased the sense of safety. Through Chapter 6, I have explored the idea that Gwen appeared to be openly and actively engaged in a renewal process of her own devising, and this allowed me to integrate her notions of renewal within my analysis, rather than imposing my own. Her story offered some insight into the intricacies of the self that she performed, narrated and renewed through Living Stories, and her participation appeared to demonstrate that applied theatre has the capacity to engage with participants' own sense of personal renewal and work with this within the art form.
Tina’s story of renewal in Chapter 7 was dependent not on her own articulation of notions of change or self-creation, but on my observations. Her story demonstrated the messiness of this process: just as the narratives and roles that inform it do, renewal itself has a dark side. Her story raised a question for me as to whether or not the violent and vulnerable life narratives and negative roles that often informed her work in the artistic frame were a necessary part of the rhythm between habit and innovation. For Tina, renewal appeared not necessarily as a relentless march towards beauty, harmony and positivity, but at times (to my outsider eye) seemed dangerous, disharmonious and even “perversely beautiful” (Bharucha, 2011 as cited in Mackey & Stuart Fisher, 2011).

Mandy’s research interest, and therefore her story in Chapter 8 pointed my enquiry specifically towards emotion. While emotion is implicit within any story of art-centred aesthetic experience, I have foregrounded it in Mandy’s story and explored how emotional unbinding might have held a significant place in her sense of renewal. This is a brief summary of how renewal was positioned in each of the individual case stories, and demonstrates an emphasis more on personal rather than cultural renewal. Within the aesthetic and philosophical frame that has informed my study, there is an acknowledgement that cultural renewal is dependent first upon one’s attention to self-care and self-creation (see Bruner, 1986, 1991a; Dewey, 1934; Granger, 2001, 2006, 2010; Sarbin, 1997, 1998b, 2005; Shusterman, 2000b, 2000c, 2002, 2006a, 2006b, 2008a, 2008b, 2011a, 2011b, 2012), and in each of the women’s stories, there is a sense that their movement in this sense certainly had cultural implications. The culture of the institution is explored in Chapter 4, and throughout this chapter, there is a sense of the rhythm between habit and innovation in terms of how the women storied the environment, and how they responded to the new culture of our drama workshop space. Gwen was making a significant impact on the culture of the jail with the expansion of her own horizons – rehearsing and performing new roles in her interactions with others and developing more positive relationships. Tina and Mandy’s engagement was having an impact on how Helen and other staff members saw them, but with Tina, this was at times a double-edged sword, as she may have been perpetuating her own mentally unstable and dangerous role within the culture of the jail.

The aesthetic frame for this study has positioned the rhythm between habit and innovation as vital in the ever-expanding horizon of self/world-making and renewal in both art and life. The habits of role and narrative can therefore be seen as paving stones in the spontaneous pathway towards innovation and renewal. Innovation in the episodes I have described was dependent on the participants having a sense of openness
to possibility or risk, of letting go, but with habit acting as a kind of touchstone to help
gauge the risk, and anchor the meaning and value of their expansion into new horizons.
Narrative habits and bound-up roles in the actual frame influenced the operation of
emotion, spontaneity, narrative and role in the artistic frame, and following the
hermeneutic cycle of experience and knowing, the reverse must also have been true. The
analysis in Chapter 5 highlights how I became locked into a standoff with Lola, with
each of us reverting to habitual roles such as heavy and smug teacher in order to
maintain our own sense of self-protection, power and control within the familiar yet
strange environment of the drama workshop. In this case, the adversarial game of jail
was being played out within the structure of the drama games, rendering the process
unsafe and unproductive. As such, there was little sense of unbinding or renewal, but
rather the maintenance of the status quo. Aamira’s engagement in roles such as Wonder
Woman and Queen in the artistic frame described in Chapter 4 possibly kept her bound in
perpetuating a habitual personal narrative that seemed artificial, even fantastical. Also
described in Chapter 4, Patti’s habitual survival role as the entertainer – keeping her own
and others’ spirits up in jail – was engaged in a new narrative context, where the
structures of the drama enabled her to hone the artistry and ethical dimension of her
inherent improvisation skills. Similarly, Mandy was able to reconfigure her habitual role
as the staunch, strong, silent backbone of her prison family and family outside, by
infusing the character of Mary McKillop with these qualities and merging them with her
expanding emotional articulacy. Gwen’s story represents a clear example of this
expansion, where she was consciously working on breaking her old habits and
experimenting with new ways of being that moved her beyond roles such as mother or
wicked criminal. Through the Superheroes exercise, Gwen recognised her habitual
mother role, and its limitations in the expanding horizon of her self-creation since
coming to jail and pursuing her own interests. In Gwen’s case, her self-consciousness
and self-control were reflected in improvised characters that showed upright dignity and
physical restraint. Tina showed a habitual lethargy and disengagement during reflective
discussions and scenes that did not involve her that she said was typical of her usual life
in the jail. However, there were times when this dissolved in the spontaneity of certain
improvisations, where she demonstrated somatic energy and abandon. Her habitual
mistrust and paranoia within the adversarial narrative of the jail made her reluctant to
disclose personal narrative material in criminogenic programs, yet in the artistic frame of
the drama, she found ways to explore this problematic narrative through spontaneous
responses in improvisation games and devising processes. At times Mandy
demonstrated habitual, safe forms of spontaneity through her deadpan humour in
improvisation, which likely served her well in the early stages of the process, perhaps enabling her to take more risks later on. Yet she also retained some of these elements in her performance of Mary McKillop, at times lending the more illustrative representation of this role a heightened sense of authenticity.

As is evident from the summary above, a poetics of self-creation also informed the poetics of renewal, and this could be seen as a significant aspect of many applied theatre practices where the self is seen as a fluid role within the performance of experience and story. My attempts at explicit exploration of personal narrative through the process were risky in terms self-disclosure – particularly for participants like Karen, Lola, Grace and Tina. This caused me to re-think my initial interest in reminiscence and testimonial forms, and move us towards the fictional and aspirational narratives of the Superheroes exercise and Inspiring Women from History. Yet throughout the process, I was still keen to explore the alignment between the women’s own experiences and personal stories, and those of the characters that they were depicting. In some cases, I also gleaned aspects of this alignment from the fragments of personal story that the women shared in less formal parts of the process. In some instances, this approach gave the women an opportunity to story themselves in creative ways that they perhaps had not done in other programs; and story themselves differently from how they had done previously in dealing with the “coercive theatre” (Foucault, 1991, pp. 251-252) of the system; but not always. In some instances the drama appeared to allow the women to expand into another horizon, whereas at other times it seemed to reinforce the habitual versions of self and familiar parts of the autobiography that might be seen as negative or destructive in the context of ideal versions of renewal. For Emma and Gwen, the process of self-creation in the drama was informed by reconnecting with and reclaiming a sense of self that had been lost through their difficult relationships and life experiences. In Emma’s case, the role of Amelia Earhart appeared to provide an objective vehicle with which to articulate and explore her returning confidence and vivacity. Gwen appeared to be aware of her own “creative self-fashioning” (Shusterman, 2000c, 2006b, 2008b, 2009a, 2011a, 2011b, 2012) through arts such as writing and drama, and the ways that fictional and artistic roles and narratives could integrate with her actual life experience to expand her horizons. In Gwen’s case, the whole arc of Living Stories and her other artistic pursuits in the jail were providing her with opportunities to “be herself” as she put it, which in fact appeared as a complex rhythm between how she saw herself in the past, present and future; how she imagined others saw her; her imaginative sense of the roles that she might play; and how these were
added to what she saw as her core self. In creating space for participants to be themselves, some of the roles that were adopted were indicative of the more negative, habitual roles that were being played within the adversarial narrative of the jail environment. In Lola’s story for example, the freedom to be herself may have initially meant that she was able to continue to exercise her role as heavy or sexual predator without challenge. For Tina, the freedom may have at times led to reinforcing negative images of her as crazy or unhinged. Living Stories therefore reflected both habit and innovation in the women’s self-creation. In some instances, habit won out; in other instances, the horizon of the self was expanded in subtle or profound ways. I would suggest that space must be created for both, and that this is one of the key rhythms to which the applied theatre practitioner must be attuned.

Engagement and Renewal

In the previous section, I have summarised more broadly the poetics of self-creation and renewal as I saw them operating in Living Stories, and drawn together some observations about the operation of the vital rhythm between habit and innovation. In this section, I will address the “nature of the women’s engagement” part of my primary research question in more detail, reflecting on the operation of emotion, spontaneity, role and narrative within the art of process and looking more deeply into the relationship between these and the potential movement towards renewal. Put in the simplest sense, I have focused on emotional and aesthetic engagement through spontaneity, role and narrative – but these terms are themselves difficult to separate out, and operate in a dynamic flow that overlaps and shifts, sometimes at the edge of my vision. As I have explained, my exploration of engagement has been limited by the fact that this interest emerged later on in the study, and therefore is reliant on my interpretation and analysis after the fact. The role of the bound-up prison person as introduced by Gwen, and my subsequent exploration of renewal in terms of unbinding had such strong somatic connotations that I also became interested in how engagement might be conceived in terms of somatic and somaesthetic engagement (Shusterman, 2000a, 2000b, 2006a, 2008b, 2009a, 2011b, 2012). Within this, I have acknowledged that Shusterman and those who have followed him have yet to devote significant focus to this experiential aspect of somaesthetics, which has made my analysis in this direction somewhat tentative.

The operation of emotion in Living Stories has been explored primarily within Mandy’s story, but it is present across all of my case stories as a significant element of all
aspects of engagement and expression in the drama process. I will hold it up for some initial examination here first, before integrating it with other aspects of engagement such as spontaneity, narrative and role below. I have recognised the significance of emotion firstly in seeing it as the qualitative “searchlight” (Carroll, 1997, p. 201) that guides and colours the spontaneous selection and rejection of material in all creative and expressive endeavour, including narrative and role as they operate in both the actual and artistic frames (see also Dewey, 1934; Courtney, 1995; Goldie, 2012; P. W. Jackson, 1998; Johnson, 2007; Lutterbie, 2006; Radford, 2004). Through Mandy’s story, I have explicitly explored the connection between emotion and renewal, with an assertion that a significant aspect of Mandy’s unbinding occurred through being able to experience emotion operating sometimes simultaneously in a number of different ways – what I have referred to as emotional complexity. As part of this emotional complexity, I have recognised Dewey’s aesthetic emotion as a heightened form of thinking-feeling that occurs in aesthetic (or somaesthetic) engagement and experience. While it is impossible to determine after the fact whether or when the women experienced aesthetic emotion, I have explored the connections between emotion, spontaneity and role, where the performance of role involves integration between the doing and undergoing of emotion (see Blair, 2006, 2009; G. M. Bolton, 1984; O’Neill, 1995; O’Toole, 1992). In this sense, I have highlighted an interdependent relationship between emotion, role and the soma that may guide somatic habits, via spontaneity, towards innovation and renewal. I would suggest that the connection between emotion and renewal in aesthetic experience is therefore more complex than how I had previously seen it conceived within the context of psychological and rehabilitation theory. My analysis of Living Stories has enabled me to see that there is there something inherently powerful about emotional complexity as it occurs in art-based experiences. Experiencing, expressing and representing emotions in the context of the drama process means that they are being elevated or refined outwards and upwards from the self towards the art work (or object or world) in concert with other participants, yet simultaneously being experienced inwardly within the soma. A significant aspect of unbinding and renewal might therefore involve exploring the emotional complexity that exists within the art of process: the rhythm between doing and undergoing emotion through dual affect and metaxis (see Allern, 2001; Boal, 1995; G. M. Bolton, 1984, 1985; Bundy, 2003a; Cahill, 2010; Jackson & Leahy, 2005; Linds, 2006; O’Connor, 2009; O’Neill, 1995; O’Toole, 1992; Perry, 2012); emotion as the searchlight that informs and colours our expressive choices in the act of creation; and the potential to experience the heightened state of aesthetic emotion as described by Dewey. Expanding on Shusterman’s theory (2000a, 2000b, 2006a, 2008b,
2009a, 2011b, 2012), this embodied emotional complexity might therefore become a significant element of somaesthetic experience and engagement in applied theatre.

Following on from the above, somaesthetic engagement in applied theatre might be seen as incorporating not only thinking and feeling as is often described as key to aesthetic engagement (see Abbs, 1989; Best, 1992; G. M. Bolton, 1984; Bruner, 1986; Bundy, 2003a, 2003b; Courtney, 1995; Dewey, 1934; Greene, 1995; A. Jackson, 2005; Johnson, 2007; Taylor & Warner, 2006; Witkin, 1974); but also the embodied, emotional somatic experiencing and expressiveness that occurs in the spontaneity of improvisation, and the performance of a role or character. Integrated with these is the potential for narrative engagement, where the improvised or rehearsed performances occur within a co-created improvised or rehearsed narrative context that itself holds potential for emotional and aesthetic engagement. In Living Stories, I have suggested that the bound-up prison person might have manifested in Lola as a habitual and physically threatening heavy role; in Gwen as being self-conscious and hyper aware of her body in the space; in Tina as being lethargic, static and disengaged; and in Mandy as being the robot without emotion. Both Tina and Gwen appeared to feel a sense of risk in placing their bodies under the scrutiny of others, and the fact that they did this in the context of the drama might itself represent a form of unbinding. Gwen occasionally let herself go and responded spontaneously with emotionally charged performances in improvisation, and seemed to recognise that representing extreme emotion through role was an aspect of the performance process that would further unbind her. Similarly, the double-edged sword of Tina's somatic and somaesthetic engagement in improvisation games were in complete contrast to her frequent embodied disengagement, and in this arena, she was able to achieve a certain measure of success in responding spontaneously and committing physically to the unfolding narrative of the games. Where Mandy's habitual touchstone in improvisation was in the safe spontaneity of deadpan humour, Tina's was more in her apparent unpredictability and madness. In both cases, these might be key elements of the self that were brought, via spontaneity, into the unfolding flow of improvisation. Like Gwen, Mandy appeared to recognise the fact that emotion played a strong role in the process of unbinding, and her growing awareness of this coincided with her becoming less minimal and showing more facial expressiveness as time went on, particularly when she left behind her habitual deadpan humour and invested the role of Mary McKillop with what appeared to be aspects of her own emotional life. These case stories provided an opportunity to explore the nature of engagement as a rhythm between doing and undergoing, wherein the soma acts as both
the expressive medium and the “subjective locus of aesthesis” (Shusterman, 2006b, 2008b, 2009b, 2011a, 2011b, 2012). They have suggested to me that what works best aesthetically for an audience or outside eye may therefore also work somaesthetically for the performers, engaging them not only in an aesthetically satisfying performance, but also in a heightened and ameliorative process of making. This found clear examples in Emma’s portrayal of Amelia Earhart, and Mandy’s portrayal of Mary McKillop. In Emma’s case, her own vivacity infused the role, and vice versa, with this dialectic being communicated directly to Helen in the audience. Similarly, Helen was able to perceive a level of passion in Mandy that she had not previously seen as she communicated the role and story of Mary McKillop. This further demonstrates the process-product integration that is crucial in applied theatre and strongly reflected in Dewey’s aesthetics (see Rasmussen & Gürgens, 2006). The unfolding dramaturgy of participants’ autobiographies, and their potential for renewal, was informed and formed by the process of unbinding, which was dependent upon the somaesthetic power of the embodied creative process, and the performances that were made. Further to this, the cultural renewal that was possible from these performances was brought about by Helen not only seeing the women differently, but also by her engaging aesthetically with the emotional and somaesthetic power of their performances.

Recommendations

I am able to make a number of recommendations for future work that traverse the boundaries between theory and practice, and between my own practice-research and the broader field. Within this, I will also include observations about the limitations of my study and how these might be addressed in the future. Throughout this aesthetic analysis, I have identified the somatic qualities of habitual roles such as the bound-up prison person, and explored the idea of unbinding as a significant aspect of engagement and renewal in Living Stories that might position it as an example of somaesthetic practice. As such, I believe that it has transferrable potential in terms of other prison theatre practices, where there may exist many different habitual versions of the bound-up prison person that may be unbound through the process. As a practitioner, this study has therefore made me more aware of the need to challenge the safe and habitual somatic responses of participants more through the roles that they play and the performances that they create. Yet this unbinding occurs within the context of habitual prison narratives, and the restrictions, scrutiny and surveillance that are performed within the environment. The art of participation in a prison context therefore involves the constant negotiation and renegotiation of the relationship between the (unbinding)
self and the (bound-up) world, which reflects the complex nature of personal and cultural renewal. As I have suggested, renewal has been presented here not as a substitute for transformation, nor as a fixed interventionist weapon to be held aloft when approaching “difficult” contexts. Hopefully the case stories and experiences described here demonstrate that it can be seen as a complex aesthetic process that lives at the heart of all art-based and ordinary experiences, and therefore shifts and changes according to the hands in which it is placed. Throughout these discoveries, there is also a sense of the different rhythms that drive the songs of our experience, the interaction and integration between them being a significant aspect of how the arts of participation and process unfold. This study represents the development of my understanding of these rhythms, and my role as a practitioner in conducting the group in their passage between and through them.

As I have discussed previously, one significant challenge for my study was a lack of focus or clear orientation for my practice in a prison context, but this also represented an opportunity to evolve my practice along side my understanding of its theoretical and aesthetic implications – a process that is hopefully articulated here. This lack of focus in the practice also led to a similar lack of focus in the research, which often leaned towards instrumental, extrinsic benefit rather than aesthetic experience. Yet this again was an opportunity for me to actively explore a movement from instrumentalism towards aesthetics, reflecting the current tide in applied theatre research as practitioners and scholars grapple with how to achieve integration between these two seemingly oppositional concepts (see O'Connor & Anderson, 2015; G. White 2015). A clear recommendation for my own work in the future would be to position it more firmly within aesthetic experience from the outset, and therefore incorporate this more cohesively into the creative, reflective and interpretive process. With this clearer focus, I would hope to facilitate a more ethical and participatory research process where there might be more time for consultation with the women, more comprehensive follow up and collaborative analysis, and an opportunity for the women’s voices to be more present in the reporting and dissemination of the work. There is opportunity here for ethical research to be integrated with ethical practice, possibly through the use of video or voice recording in performance. Using these approaches, I might also to find ways to facilitate deeper, more sustained aesthetic engagement for a fluctuating or mobile participant group.

In this study, I have focused specifically on role and narrative as embodied modes of expression, and within this, the operation of spontaneity and emotion. I
believe there is significant potential for further exploration of these elements within the aesthetic of applied theatre practices, and I would suggest that an additional exploration of image as a mode of expression might also yield interesting insights about the nature of engagement and potential for renewal. Further to this, I believe that there is significant potential in further developing the alignment between aesthetic and narrative analysis in applied theatre, for example extending on Saldaña’s (2009) notions of dramaturgical coding by exploring experience and narrative in applied theatre as dramaturgy. I now see how vital it is that I develop a practice that is more aesthetically charged, and offers the participants more opportunities for deeper emotional and aesthetic (or somaesthetic) engagement. Within this, I see potential in continuing to explore the poetics of self- and world-creation, and the possibility for the group to explicitly explore the complexity of the different selves and worlds that we create through the drama. I also believe that an intentional, practical and theoretical application of somaesthetics would enable practitioners to explore how prisoners’ bodies are impacted by their environment and life experiences, how these manifest as performative habits, and how the body might enact different forms of renewal through the creative process that have cultural implications. Through this study, I have hopefully also demonstrated that the dialectic between the artistic-actual and fictional-factual frames operating in applied theatre – the life-art rhythm – can continue to be explored as a fundamental driving force of aesthetic experience across the range of forms that exist within the field.

Conclusion

This study has hopefully presented the reader with a number of original contributions to how we might conceive aesthetics in applied theatre and prison theatre. By comprehensively exploring my practice using a pragmatist aesthetic framework, I have attempted to find a new way to integrate the aesthetic with the instrumental in applied theatre. My aesthetic theory has been developed and refined through an analysis of the practice, hopefully providing depth and complexity to the humanising and transformative potentials of prison theatre. The overarching conclusion of my exploration is that personal and cultural renewal in applied theatre is a complex process that is driven by a vital rhythm between habit and innovation. I have demonstrated that renewal in Living Stories was dependent upon the participants having an opportunity to exercise their habitual roles and narratives across all frames, and revise these through somaesthetic engagement and spontaneity, towards innovation. This existed as a necessary tension that underpinned the poetics of self- and world-creation in this context, and it did not always result in renewal. It was therefore not as simple as creating
new narratives, experimenting with new roles, trying something new, or showing a new 
side of oneself. Nor was it necessarily a positive and harmonious undertaking that led 
towards absolute goodness. I have highlighted the adversarial game as a habitual way of 
storying the prison context, the idea of life being on hold as a habitual way of storying 
experience in this context, and the bound-up prison person as a key role that the 
women manifested in different ways as they negotiated their way through these 
narratives. I have also acknowledged that the notion of renewal itself appeared at times 
to be bound-up in narratives that were informed by institutional versions of reform and 
rehabilitation. These examples of self- and world-making in the actual frame often 
penetrated the workshop space and informed the participation, process and knowing 
within that space as we worked within the artistic frames of the drama. My exploration 
of renewal in this context has therefore become an exploration of how different forms 
of unbinding might have occurred for the women (or not) through the process. As such, 
I have identified that a significant aspect of unbinding and renewal might therefore 
involve an embodied exploration of the emotional complexity that exists within the art 
of process. Further to this, I have suggested that somatic and somaesthetic engagement 
is vital for participants in order for them to create aesthetically satisfying performance 
products, but also for them to achieve a heightened and ameliorative process of making. 
The stories that I have told here have been accompanied by the constant drumming of 
the integrative tensions and rhythms that underpin aesthetic experience, and I have 
attempted to explore how we engaged with those rhythms. The art of living is an 
intricate dance to those rhythms, and these stories of experience show that we are all 
constantly shifting in and out of step, as we come together and move apart on the floor 
of the world.
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