

PARtake: The Journal of Performance as Research

Volume 4, Issue 1 – August 2021

ISSN: 2472-0860



In Search of Truth: Performance as Product, Process and Pedagogy

Jo Ronan — Independent Artist and Scholar

Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk acknowledge that their interest in practice as research (PAR) stems from its potential to make an “epistemological intervention” into institutionalized truth, as theorized by Michel Foucault.¹ I invest in PAR because of its capacity to disrupt hierarchies in the production and dissemination of knowledge. I commit to spontaneous explorations of truth, as theorized by Alain Badiou. Truth can be compromised when it is defined by those for whom it is more important to preserve the status quo than to promote rights and equality. Constructions of truth should materialize outside institutionalized structures in order to challenge the premises of knowledge created within them. PAR, through its embodied interrogation of the wider material world, provides the Academy with a way of radicalizing the creation of knowledge so that definitions of truth can be developed from justice and equality.

The Experiment

I formed BloodWater Theater (BWT), a collective of seven artists, to test the possibility of putting ownership at the center of collaborative theater practice and to assess the effects this approach would have on ways of making theater.² DCT materialized during the course of this experiment. The experiment was designed as a two-stage project. Stage one took the form of *Whose Story Is It Anyway?* (WSA), a free-ticket work-in-progress production, developed in our own time and pitched to potential funders at the Tron Theater, Glasgow in 2011. My original intention was that I would raise funding for artists’ wages and production costs for stage two. Stage two did not materialize as intended because I failed to secure funding. When I suggested abandoning stage two altogether, the other artists volunteered their unpaid labor and we collectively produced the follow-on ticketed performance, *Leave Your Shoes at the Door* (LYSD) staged at the CCA in Glasgow in 2014. The absence of monetary capital, and the willingness of the collective to work without payment, prompted me to redesign stage 2 so as to explore alternative definitions of ownership. This led to the naming of artistic vision as the most significant currency of capital and the key determiner of ownership in the context of BWT’s work. Explorations of truth became fundamental to the pedagogy we developed to facilitate our collective ownership of artistic vision.

In designing and conducting the experiment, four non-linear interrelated processes were employed:

- The examination of the field
- The intellectual engagement with concept
- The formation and development of a collective
- The praxis.

The research design was premised on Friedrich Engels' three laws of the dialectic³ and Baz Kershaw's minimum constituents of PAR, which he frames in terms of paradoxes.⁴ Processes of iteration⁵ and explorations of truth⁶ also influenced the design.

The Field

There are many valid and diverse reasons for artistic collaboration. The purpose for reviewing the field in this context was to determine whether any models of non-hierarchical collaboration existed and whether they were premised on the collective ownership of artistic vision. From Bertolt Brecht and Joan Littlewood to more recent and contemporary ensembles, collaborative practice appears to be steeped in hierarchical modes of production.

Brecht, who co-founded the Berliner Ensemble with his wife Helene Weigel in 1949, identified himself as a Marxist. He questioned the hierarchical nature of the rehearsal process and the director as the sole determinant of the process. Influenced by Karl Marx's formulation of the dialectic, he believed that the director's role should be inductive and that what was learned was more important than the lesson itself. His view was that the state apparatus turned theatre into a consumable product and that the individualism of capitalism needed to be challenged via the collectivism of socialism.⁷ While he afforded members of the ensemble some limited creative agency, he was nevertheless the artistic director, leading the vision for the ensemble and its work. It is questionable whether the principles he advocated were undermined when his wife was given the role of general manager and lead actor. He relied on "stars" and postponed his staging of *The Life of Galileo*

several times because his preferred actors were unavailable. Hierarchies in the ensemble were “weakened rather than eliminated.”⁸

Théâtre du Soleil (TdS), founded in 1964 by Ariane Mnouchkine, is often regarded as a good example of collaborative practice. Mnouchkine led on a policy of equal pay for all TdS artists at a time when hierarchical divisions of power and wage stratification were increasingly accepted as a central feature of the general economy. Despite the current hegemony of neoliberalism and free market competition, at TdS “salaries are still more or less equal across the company, and far from generous: €1,400 a month for new arrivals, €1,800 for long-term members, including Mnouchkine herself.”⁹ Like Brecht, however, she is the leader, responsible for the artistic direction of the cooperative. Adrian Kiernander notes that the company is publicized as having a collective organizational structure, but to the public the leadership of Mnouchkine is evident. He refers to TdS as a family where all the members are siblings, but Mnouchkine is the parent. He points out, however, that Mnouchkine is never perceived by the other members of the collective as their “employer” with one member going as far as to say, “we do not work for Théâtre du Soleil, we are the Théâtre du Soleil.”¹⁰ Philippe Léotard, one of the ten founding members, defends Mnouchkine’s leadership, saying that she was recognized by the company as their director—they did not want to “direct collectively.” He suggests that if they did, “[they] would still be in the process of thinking about [their] first production, and [they] would have never got round to performing.”¹¹

The immediate aim of Theater Workshop, founded in 1945 by Joan Littlewood, was “to be a Leftish living newspaper, presenting instant dramatizations of contemporary history.” Kenneth Tynan confirms that it was run on a “completely egalitarian basis” with directors, designers, actors and stage staff getting “an equal share of the takings.”¹² In a recurring theme of husband-and-wife partnerships, Littlewood was married to Ewan MacColl, who wrote many of the scripts and they led the company together. Littlewood claims:

I do not believe in the supremacy of the director, designer, actor, or even the writer. It's through collaboration that this knockabout theater survives and kicks.¹³

Although the “funds were shared equally among the company, and it was intended that the policy decisions would be made collectively, Littlewood and MacColl held all the power until MacColl's departure in 1953.”¹⁴ Nevertheless the authors recognize Littlewood's contribution to developing the role of director as facilitator rather than instructor.¹⁵

With the postmodernist movement gaining momentum in the latter half of the twentieth century, companies such as Forced Entertainment, The Wooster Group, Goat Island, Elevator Repair Service and Song of the Goat, among others, experimented with new models of production. While the performance texts by these companies were/are created more collaboratively than their predecessors, the overall aesthetics and artistic vision were/are still essentially director-led.

Paige McGinley observes that twenty-first century New York based companies represent “a new generation in ensemble-devised performance.”¹⁶ She discusses Banana Bag & Bodice, Ex.Pgirl, Hotel Savant, Knife Inc., New Paradise Laboratories, Temporary Distortion and Witness Relocation, identifying that they “share similar approaches to storytelling and employ dramaturgical structures that hinge on networked spatiality, rather than on linear teleology.”¹⁷ She sees the future of contemporary performance in ensemble-devised work, but suggests that these companies' motivations for collaboration stem from “utility” rather than any expressed intention to make theater in non-hierarchical ways.¹⁸ Similarly, the contemporary Brooklyn-based ensemble, The Team, have a core group of members and a growing number of associate artists “all deeply committed to the company's collaborative process of devising performance.” This process, however, is led by their artistic director, Rachel Chavkin.¹⁹

One exception emerges from this field: The People Show. It operates without a director or anyone claiming overall artistic vision. Its “ethos and practice” are developed from a “non-autocratic process” where the “process is not led by one person's vision; rather it's open to everybody's agendas, contributions and ideas.”²⁰

As the Associate Director of left wing companies, The Necessary Stage (Singapore) and 7:84 Theater (Scotland), I too had been involved in apparently collaborative production processes which were, in fact, based on hierarchical divisions of labor. The People Show demonstrates the possibility of delivering professional performances through genuinely non-hierarchical collaborative processes. Building on the types of creative agency practised by artists of the past and present, my PAR experiment explored alternatives to hierarchical collaboration and the pedagogical routes to achieving this.

The Concept

I was drawn to Marxism as a student activist in Singapore in the 1980s, and co-founder of The Necessary Stage in 1987, a company committed to the transformative power of theater. In designing this experiment, I turned to Marxism again to help me find alternatives to hierarchical collaborative practice. Marx's theory of capital, its key concept of cooperation and Engels' three laws of the dialectic underpin the design of the experiment. In this section I summarize the theoretical basis for BWT's practical explorations. For a more detailed discussion, please refer to my parallel article in *Performing Ethos*.²¹

Capital is both money and commodity. Marx defines commodity as "an external object, a thing which through its qualities satisfies human needs of whatever kind." It is the "thing" which "satisfies man's need, whether directly as a means of subsistence, i.e. an object of consumption, or indirectly as a means of production."²² The intersection between use value (the usefulness of a thing, the material content of wealth realized in consumption) and exchange value (use values of one kind are exchanged for use values of another kind) determine the overall worth of a commodity.²³

Commodity, however, is also a means of production, meaning that labor can be bought and sold. Marx challenges classical economists' failure to suffix "labor" with "power," resulting in the omission of the value dimension of labor.²⁴ He defines "labor power" as "the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use value of any kind." Labor

power must take on the form of commodity if it's to enter the market: "labor power can appear in the market as a commodity only if, and in so far as, its possessor, the individual whose labor power it is, offers it for sale or sells it as a commodity"²⁵ Thus, commodity value can be synonymous with labor value, if the laborer chooses to sell his property, i.e. labor power.

Labor has two forms, the concrete form, and the abstract form. Concrete labor is useful labor that produces use value. Abstract labor is the expenditure of human labor power in determining commodity value at the point of exchange. As labor is the only constant, value can only be determined via labor. Marx determines value in terms of socially necessary labor time. He defines socially necessary labor time as "the labor time required to produce any use-value under the conditions of production normal for a given society and with the average degree of skill and intensity of labor prevalent in that society."²⁶

Cooperation is the central form of the capitalist mode of production.²⁷ It is a form of labor which materializes "when numerous workers work together side by side in accordance with a plan, whether in the same process, or in a different but connected processes." This system of cooperation increases the productivity of labor as it enables the object of labor to pass through the phases of the production process more quickly than before.²⁸

The two key concepts of capital (money and commodity) and cooperation are integrated into a holistic single concept via the dialectic. The three laws of the dialectic are:

The law of the transformation of quantity into quality and *vice versa*;
the law of the interpenetration of opposites;
the law of the negation of the negation.²⁹

While formulated as three laws, these should not be seen as distinct but related, with the third law being a synthesis of the first and second laws, resulting in a "dynamic formulation."³⁰ The first law can be understood more fully if we equate the transformations of quantity and quality to the tensions between use and exchange value; concrete and abstract labor.³¹ Its relationship to the second law is evident in John Barkley's definition of contradiction as "the conflict of

contradicting opposites that are simultaneously united in their opposition.” He refers to Marx’s relations of production as the fundamental “contradiction between use value and exchange value within the commodity itself [exemplifying the] union of conflicting opposites.”³² The third law, a union of the first two, is an expression of the “dialectical conflict of the contradictory opposites driving the dynamic to experience qualitative transformations.”³³ The problem itself becomes the solution. Negation is constantly in motion and can never arrive at a synthesis.³⁴ I problematized collaboration using Marxist theory, identifying capital and cooperation to be the primary dialectic to be interrogated through the product/process dialectic of BWT’s practice.

According to Johnathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield: “Culture is not simply a reflection of the economic and political system, but nor can it be independent of it. Cultural materialism therefore sees texts as inseparable from the conditions of their production and reception in history.”³⁵ The methodology for this research was developed from the laws of the dialectic, born out of the larger concept of cultural materialism, resulting in the original theater praxis of DCT. The experiment addresses the challenges of making performance for the cultural market while enhancing ownership for the artists, alongside critical participation of the audience/consumers. Like the laws of the dialectic, DCT has three faces. The first face highlights the tensions arising from labor as a commodity or product; the second, the tensions arising from labor as a means of production or process. Use/exchange value and concrete/abstract labor are intrinsic to these tensions. The third law, the fusion of one and two, points to the potential of pedagogy premised on truth, equality and justice to address the tensions between economic and artistic production. The three faces of DCT arise from the laws of the dialectic, its shared base. By making the dialectic central to doing and thinking, DCT became the praxis of BWT i.e. how we made and performed our work, synonymous with the pedagogical basis of our work.

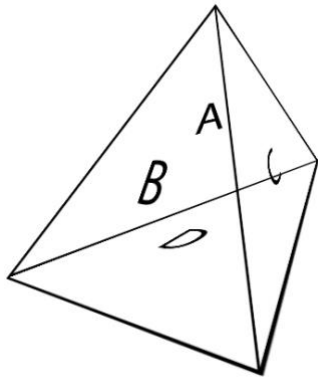


Figure 1: Pyramid Representation of DCT

Face A – DCT as Commodity:

By interrogating the contradictions that arise from BWT's labor as a commodity, we discover ways to own our labor power

Face B – DCT as Means of Production:

By interrogating the contradictions that arise from BWT's labor as a means of production, we discover ways to own the processes of our labor power

Face C – DCT as Pedagogy:

By framing DCT as pedagogy, we discover ways of fusing ideology with rehearsal methodology allowing for utopian ideals of equality, truth and collective ownership of aesthetics to permeate our creative processes.

The Base D – the three laws of the dialectic:

Originating from the foundation of the three laws of the dialectic, the three faces of DCT cooperate in growing the collective ownership of BWT's processes and products.

The Collective

Apart from myself, the group comprises Gavin Wright, Paul Chaal, Anna Nierobisz, Suzanne Morrison, Martin Smith and Jamie Walker. BWT includes four of my former acting/performance students, an actor I had directed in the past, a stage manager/designer I had worked with previously and a University colleague. Apart from Wright and Chaal, who are fulltime professional actors, the rest of us

are in part time or fulltime work, both related and unrelated to arts employment, while being involved in artistic projects as part of our employment or in our spare time. In inviting collaborators, I took into account diversity in cultural backgrounds and artists who were committed to the practice of equality.

The first meeting of the collective took place on the 4th of February 2011. I recapped the project design which I had shared with them individually when inviting them to come on board and reiterated my intention to use Marxist theory to test the possibilities of collective ownership. I qualified that this meant that I was testing whether we could:

- collectively own what we were to create
- have an equal stake in the work without having to assign individuals to specific roles (both in the making of the work or for promotional or acknowledgement purposes)
- operate within a non-hierarchical structure.

I reiterated that while Marxism was important to me as the researcher, an ideological commitment to Marxism was not necessary. I shared my embryonic thinking on DCT and some ideas on how we could work without a director. I explained that the experiment was exploratory and that their input would be vital in determining what we made and how we made it, making it clear that it was important not to over-define or predetermine the experiment.

Forming and developing the collective allowed BWT to become the vehicle whereby ownership could be tested in the real world. While other members of BWT may not have had the same investment in theoretical study as myself, they committed to developing a non-hierarchical model of collaboration by challenging their own artistic practice throughout the experiment.

The Praxis (Embedding Truth in Pedagogy)

Having concluded the experiment, I propose that pedagogical explorations of truth via the dialectic can form the basis for the design of PAR projects. Such explorations facilitate creative empowerment by “generating troublesome contradictions.”³⁶ The division between “cultural practice and teaching” persists

and the “benefits of considering them together” should be explored. Critical pedagogy and “dialogic production” can guide us in developing a dialectical relationship with “capitalism, sexism, racism and homophobia,” and form the basis for the creation of knowledge.³⁷ Exploring societal tensions can help determine the “kind of future we want for pedagogical spaces.”³⁸ Kershaw’s key components of PAR design premised on “troublesome contradictions” sat well with my Marxist dialectical framework.

The case for dialectics as a method for facilitating new ways of creating and participating in performance is strong, but not sufficient in itself. Philosophical explorations of truth are necessary. Jameson distinguishes Marxism from “purely philosophical systems” and other “ideological movements” because it dispels “ideology by way of praxis, by action.”³⁹ Similarly, Brian Schultis refers to Marxism’s roots in praxis when highlighting that what unites PAR and Performance Philosophy is their engagement with the “question of action,” which cannot be separated from their shared epistemology and ethics. He discusses Plato’s *Republic* where the “proposed education of the guardians of the Republic” takes place. This learning first takes place in the senses, necessitating “further thought” so the learner is “led down a path of knowledge beginning with arithmetic and ending with dialectics. He moves from the unstable realm of becoming towards the pure Truth of being.”⁴⁰ The cycle of engaging with thought, the senses, “further thought” and further dialogic reengagement with the senses, is never static. This cyclical process is necessary for truth, also never static, to emerge and re-emerge. Using Kershaw’s five key features of PAR, DCT was developed from the dialectical interplay between process and product; praxis and Badiou’s habitus of truth.

Kershaw names “starting points, aesthetics, location, transmission and key issues” as the five “minimal constituents” of PAR.⁴¹ In line with Kershaw’s minimal constituents I/we engaged with the process/product dialectic in developing our rehearsal/performance methodology. DCT provided coherence to our articulation of pedagogy, which in turn enabled the argument for the collective ownership of collaborative theater to develop. DCT presented BWT with

opportunities to influence artistic vision systematically throughout the experiment. In this section I provide examples from BWT's practice for all five of Kershaw's constituents, focusing primarily on aesthetics. We/I discovered various ways of increasing the collective ownership of our productions through thinking, discussion and debate. However, it was the pedagogy we unearthed through our experimentations with aesthetics, which proved to be the most significant, because of how truth materialized spontaneously.

Within the requirements of the Academy, research questions have to be framed with a certain degree of predictability. Starting points, however, can be multiple and unpredictable. In keeping with law two, Kershaw describes this contradiction as being "between the predictability-quotient of questions (even the most open ones imply a range of answers) and the unpredictable prompting of hunches."⁴² My experiment began with a hunch that my personal experience of the lack of collective ownership within collaborative theater was more common than has been acknowledged—a hunch that if I could find an analogy between the definition of ownership in Marx's formulation of capital and cooperation, and the products and processes of performance, BWT might discover an alternative to prevailing collaborative practice. My hunch suggested that process and product need not be at the expense of each other. To test these suppositions, I framed my research topic as *Capital, Cooperation and Creating Performance: BloodWater Theater Develops Ownership in Collaborative Theater Practice*, adhering to the Academy's requirement for a "tighter focus of analysis."⁴³ Unpredictable truths surfaced through sustained engagement with dialectical practice, via the predictable framing of the experiment. I was reassured about the validity of my hunches early on in the experiment when I invited collaborators. These invited artists were interested in the processes we could explore to develop ownership within our collective practice, but it was the guarantee of a performance at the Tron (some sort of product that we could create together and share with an audience) in addition to this, which led them to accept the invitation and commit to the project.

The "joker in the PaR pack," described as "how to fall into contradiction without only contradicting itself," emphasizes the relevance of the laws,

particularly, the third, to BWT's pedagogy.⁴⁴ The negation of funding could have resulted in the termination of the project altogether. Instead, we worked with the laws to find solutions which in turn brought about new knowledge. BWT worked with the dialectal tensions of amateur/professional; work/leisure; economic/social capital and were able to produce *LYSD* at a professional venue but with no pay for the artists. This led to further key issues such as the ethics of using social capital and unremunerated labor.

Social inequality is perpetuated by social capital as well as economic capital, i.e. those who have access to institutionalized networks and relationships gain advantage over others.⁴⁵ BWT put equality at the center of our practice, yet we readily used our institutionalized networks to gain advantage in producing *LYSD*. Did this undermine the "truth" of our collective non-hierarchical practice? Applying dialectical analysis helped us to recognize that the benefits arising from social capital materialized only because of our loss of economic capital. The small profit we made from ticket sales was donated to the CCA, our primary benefactor of social capital. Tickets for *LYSD* unreserved seats were priced at £0, £2, £5, £8 and £10 with the audience deciding what they would like pay and the option to attend for free. Our use of social capital did not perpetuate inequality.

As we were not remunerated, I looked to law one and two for guidance on redesigning the experiment. Socially necessary labor time, integral to this redesign, was constantly reviewed by BWT in determining the worth of our labor power in the context of abstract/concrete labor and use/exchange value. In doing so, we guarded against the reification of our labor, as the quantity of our labor expressed through the time spent on creation, and the quality of our labor expressed in the conditions of our working environment, were continually assessed. The absence of funding did not lead to the exploitation of our labor but led instead to the merits of naming artistic vision as the key determiner of ownership, allowing us to grow our stake in *WSA* and *LYSD* through these means. The joker in my PAR pack also alerted me to my unease about my singular ownership of the thesis which could only materialize with the practice of BWT. Discussions during the formation of BWT led us to embrace the dialectical relationship between my thesis and our

practice. While the practice is embedded in the thesis, BWT artists saw no reason why they could not collectively own the processes and products of our collective labor power without claiming ownership of the thesis, which they felt belonged to me as the researcher. In short, truths which were/are important to us as artists were protected because DCT was premised on the protection of the rights of the laborer.

When describing “locations,” Kershaw points out that the site of performance is bound to the specificity of time and place, yet the dialectical nature of performance lends itself to limitless possibilities.⁴⁶ As the researcher, I wanted to test the possibilities of collective ownership when making performance for consumption in conventional auditoria and invited collaborators who would be committed to exploring this with me. Our performances were therefore designed to take place in the Tron and the CCA. I was also interested in exploring the potential for audiences to own the performances in these venues and shared with BWT my interest in experimenting with applied theater pedagogy. Some BWT artists were concerned about audiences’ expectations at such venues. However, after discussion all were keen to explore the CCA as a dialectical space, using applied theater practice to this end.

Citing a number of applied theater researchers, Rikke Gjaerum concludes that “there seems to be a collective global understanding that Applied Theater is theater outside conventional mainstream theater houses.”⁴⁷ Sally Mackey distinguishes the applied theater researcher from the artist-academic, in that “s/he is frequently the facilitator of other people”⁴⁸ while Peilin Liang highlights the peculiarity of applied theater PAR in terms of “its stakeholders and the kind of knowledge it generates”⁴⁹ and May identifies applied as “one of the most valuable areas” of PAR.⁵⁰ This binary of professional performance and applied practice, and the prevalent commodification of theater auditoria, including state funded ones, troubles me. My engagement with the laws of the dialectic, particularly law two, helped me work productively with the contradictions of performer/audience, stage area/seating area and applied/professional theater. In my early years as an artist in Singapore these ontological distinctions were blurred and formed the basis of my practice, developed from Augusto Boal’s dialectic of spectator and actor. Can

applied theater only take place outside theater houses? What types of participation can take place in theater auditoria? Is it possible for professional artists to also be applied theater practitioners, able to foster a sense of community in conventional theater houses? What type of stakeholders and new knowledge can emerge from the integration of these ontological distinctions? The flexible seating arrangements at the CCA allowed for a reconfiguration of the traditional raked seating to accommodate our staging requirements. The audience at each show was limited to sixty, with five groups of twelve sitting in a semi-circle around five tables, placed strategically in the seating area so that all could see the action on stage. As we were unremunerated, our dialectical status as amateur but professionally trained artists gave us an opportunity to experiment with developing a small professional theater space as a dialectical one, where processes and products of performance could be united in their seeming opposition to each other. I doubt without Kershaw's "locations" BWT/I would have been able to curate personal encounters with the audience (described later) where truth could materialize spontaneously.

When explaining "transmissions" Kershaw says that a PAR project requires multi-modal dissemination. While the most appropriate context for the dissemination of knowledge for my PAR project is the live theater experience, this type of dissemination alone is limited. To broaden dissemination, the BWT website captures our processes and performances through photographs, performance videos, scripts and video diary reflections, which were integral to DCT's iterative rehearsal processes. The pedagogical premises of our work is made explicit on our website under the section, *Principles of Practice*.⁵¹ Thinking about multi-modal dissemination at the start of the experiment resulted in systematic data collection.

Finally, as artists-academics and practice-based researchers, we occupy a unique space in the creation and dissemination of knowledge. Our praxis enables us to create and inhabit the cerebral/transcendental/embodied space where truth resides, beyond solely cognitive, and practical domains. BWT's sustained labor in committing to exploring aesthetics enabled us to discover and act on truths about ourselves, audiences and society in general, and provided us with the possibility of achieving a non-hierarchical collaborative performance practice.

In *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*, truth is observed to be embedded within multiplicity, and manifested in an event. Badiou describes truth as axiomatic, implying that definitions are problematic because of unquestioned assumptions of truth's worth. He suggests that by developing the concept of the multiple in relation to truth, our understanding of truth can be progressed. Borrowing from mathematical set theory, he synonymises truth with multiplicity but points out that there can be no definition for the multiple because of the infinity of mathematical set formulations—it is this inconsistency that is primary. As such, he suggests that the embodiment of multiplicity within truth must be considered alongside event, which cannot be separated from truth. The event is unpredictable, has no interest in preserving status quo, is evanescent, although it may transcend time altogether and must possess its own site before presentation. The event reveals the void, and the truth names this void.⁵² Kershaw's essential components for PAR design, in particular, aesthetics, together with my developing Marxist praxis, led me to Badiou's formulation of truth.

The subject is “an active fidelity to the event of truth ... a militant of truth [who] is not only the political militant working for the emancipation of humanity ... she is also the artist-creator.”⁵³ Inspired by Badiou's event, I curated a fictional theater residency where BWT artists developed our performances in multiple identities, moving away from the actor/character or self/autobiography performance paradigm.⁵⁴ DCT enabled the event of the fictional theater residency, which in turn enabled other events to materialize without calculation, thereby exposing the void in my/BWT's praxis, allowing us the opportunity to name truths. Making the work in character (Fatima, Gordon, Pritam, Lucy and Monika) but stepping out and assessing the aesthetics as self (Jo, Gavin, Paul, Suzanne and Anna) before stepping in again, enabled our dialectical selves to inhabit the liminal space between fiction and autobiography, to discover unknown feelings, prejudices and knowledge. This in turn enabled us to develop our “fidelity to the event of truth.” Through the fictional theater residency, we were able to disrupt real or perceived *stati quo* within BWT. Unequal hierarchical relationships of the past

were realigned and each of us were given equal opportunity to influence the artistic vision of the performances we developed.

Our explorations of Badiou's truth via event gave us confidence about interacting with the audience in a character, close to us, but also removed from us. We developed Dorothy Heathcote's process drama and her "mantle of the expert" techniques together with Augusto Boal's spec-actor formulations.^{55;56} These, alongside BWT's creation of events during the performances, enabled the audience to participate spontaneously, if they chose to do so.

Before the performance, each character left objects which were important to them at the tables where the audience were to be seated. At one point during the performance, a fictional event is staged to disrupt the show. This results in each performer interacting in character with the small audience groups seated at the tables. The audience around each table were encouraged to ask the performer about the objects on the table. The seating area had taken center stage, disrupting status quo within the auditorium. Whether it was an audience member giggling, asking questions, shying away, feeling confused or hesitant, it left each artist and audience member having to confront deeper truths, which surfaced in that moment during this spontaneous event. For me, it hit home how different, how marginalized I feel both as Jo and Fatima. For one of the audience members I/Fatima encountered, perhaps giggling was the only way she knew how to react during a close encounter with an Egyptian woman in a headscarf. Perhaps truths had surfaced for her too. Our choice of using participatory theater techniques gave the audience the opportunity to experience encounters not normally expected in conventional theater spaces. The potential for truth to materialize in both applied and conventional theater spaces, is necessary to optimize theater's potential to bring about societal transformation.

An analysis of individual taste was integral to DCT. Collective aesthetics, if at the expense of individual taste, undermines the collective ownership of artistic vision. BWT artists each led workshops on our individual practice. Our wide-ranging individual practice, including rhythm and tempo exercises (to facilitate the organic passing on of leadership), explorations of theater's relationship to popular

culture, experimentations with intermedia and autobiography, as well conventional Stanislavskian techniques, were all considered as we developed our performances. We found ways of incorporating the preferred aesthetics of each artist into our overall artistic vision for each performance, developed in the metaphysical space between self and fictional identity. Our “form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken ... to improve the rationality and justice” of our practice was the means by which we negotiated competing aesthetics, legitimating individual and collective truths.⁵⁷ DCT enabled us to “choose between the alternative results created by iteration.”⁵⁸ Both *WSA* and *LYSD* were developed from iterative rehearsal processes. At the end of each rehearsal each artist evaluated the rehearsal in a video diary. These formed the basis for new iterations at the following rehearsal.

When we were secure about our individual and collective truths, we worked out ways of communicating these to the audience. The tension between the Academy’s requirement for originality and the need to address audiences’ expectations in conventional auditoria prompted innovation in aesthetics. We used conventional storytelling alongside more immersive techniques and unexpected interspersed stage and screen narratives. This helped us to develop a performance that could appeal to a conventional theater audience but at the same time provoke new thinking on the assumption behind the theatrical production and consumption process and experience. Pierre Bourdieu argues that power relations within society determine distinctions in taste.⁵⁹ Jacques Rancière argues for aesthetics being “at the core of politics” defining politics as “an anarchical process of emancipation.”⁶⁰ DCT—BWT’s pedagogy—was developed from the relationship between equality and aesthetics, where we committed to collaborative production without designated roles, going against the norms of how theater is conventionally produced. We believed that our approach of taking on multiple creative roles i.e. performing, directing, writing or designing, premised on developing a dialectical relationship between specialist and generic skills, could potentially result in new aesthetics which could interest audiences. BWT interrogated truths which surfaced during the

events we created, and these informed our aesthetic choices. We labored towards an aesthetics of truth which had meaning for us, and we hoped, for an audience.

In conclusion, dialectical thinking and practice have a central place in PAR design because of PAR's potential to generate new knowledge while embracing processes of chaos, tensions and unpredictability. My practical exploration of non-hierarchical collaborative theater would not have been possible without first interrogating Marx's theory of capital. This led me to identify and work with and against the fundamental conflict between product and process. By developing DCT, using the three laws of the dialectic to find alternatives to hierarchical collaboration, I was able to name truth as intrinsic to pedagogy and necessary in determining the ethical ownership of collaborative processes and products. Finally, I suggest that through my experiment, it is possible to progress from Nelson's "imbrication of theory" in practice, to the "imbrication of truth" in pedagogy, where pedagogy is synonymous with the practice of equality.⁶¹

¹ Owen Chapman and Kim Sawchuk, "Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances" *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37, no. 1 (2012): 5-6.

² Jo Ronan, "BloodWater Theatre." (2020). <https://www.bloodwatertheatre.co.uk/>.

³ Friedrich Engels, Clemens Dutt, and J. B. S. Haldan, *Dialectics of nature*. (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1941).

⁴ Baz Kershaw, "Practice as Research: Transdisciplinary Innovation in Action." Edited by Baz Kershaw and Helen Nicholson, *Research Methods in Theatre and Performance*. (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univesity Press, 2011).

- ⁵ Helen Smith and Roger Dean, "Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice - Towards the Iterative Cyclic Web" Edited by Helen Smith and Roger Dean, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts* (Edinburgh University Press: 2011)
- ⁶ Peter Hallward, *Badiou: A Subject to Truth*. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).
- ⁷ David Barnett, "The Berliner Ensemble: Bertolt Brecht's theories of theoretical collaboration as practice." In *Encountering Ensemble* edited by John Britton, 126-141 (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2013): 134.
- ⁸ David Barnett, *A History of the Berliner Ensemble*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015): 10-11; 26.
- ⁹ Andrew Dickson, "Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil: a life in theatre " *The Guardian*, 2012
- ¹⁰ Adrian Kiernander, *Directors in Perspective Ariane Mnouchkine and the Théâtre du Soleil*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008): 9.
- ¹¹ Ibid, 10.
- ¹² John McGrath, *A Good Night Out, Popular Theatre: Audience, Class and Form*. (London: Nick Hern Books, 1996): 45.
- ¹³ Emma Govan, Helen Nicholman, Katie Normington, *Making a Performance Devising Histories and Contemporary Practices*. (London: Routledge, 2007): 48.
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ Ibid, 49.
- ¹⁶ Paige McGinley, "Next Up Downtown, A New Generation of Ensemble Performance " *TDR: The Drama Review* 54 no. 4 (2010): 12.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ Paz Hilfinger-Pardo, "Building Chartres in the desert: The TEAM, collective intelligence and the failure of ideals." In *Encountering Ensemble*, edited by John Britton, 222-233. (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama 2013): 223.
- ²⁰ Synne K. Behrnt, "People Show #118 The Birthday Tour." In *Devising in Process*, edited by Jackie Smart Alex Mermikides. (Hampshire: Palgrave MacMillan, 2010): 30-31.
- ²¹ I am currently exploring the ideology of DCT in another forthcoming and parallel article. This article is forthcoming as of the July 2021 publication of *PARtake: The Journal of Performance as Research* 4, no. 1. Please see: Jo Ronan, "Dialectical Collaborative Theatre: Ideology, Ethics, and the Practice of Equality." *Performance Ethos* (forthcoming).
- ²² Karl Marx, *Capital Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by Ben Fowkes. (London: Penguin Classics, 1990):125.

-
- ²³ Ibid, 126.
- ²⁴ Ibid, 270-280.
- ²⁵ Ibid, 270-271.
- ²⁶ Ibid, 129-137.
- ²⁷ Ibid, 454.
- ²⁸ Ibid, 443-444
- ²⁹ Engels, Dutt, and Haldane, 26.
- ³⁰ John Barkley Rosser Jr., "Aspects of dialectics and non-linear dynamics." *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 24 (2000): 314.
- ³¹ Frederic Jameson, *Representing Capital, A Reading of Volume One*. (London: Verso, 2011): 111.
- ³² Barkley Rosser Jr., 313-314.
- ³³ Ibid, 314.
- ³⁴ Jameson, 51-56.
- ³⁵ Graham Holderness, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988): ix.
- ³⁶ Kershaw, 64-65.
- ³⁷ David Trend, *Cultural pedagogy : art/education/politics*. New York ; (London: Bergin & Garvey, 1992): 9, 25, 136
- ³⁸ Dennis Atkinson, *Art, Equality and Learning Pedagogies Against the State*. (Rotterdam: Sense Publishers, 2011): xi.
- ³⁹ Frederic Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic*. (London: Verso, 2010): 321.
- ⁴⁰ Brian Schultis, 2019. "Life, Movement, and Thought: Directions for Performance Philosophy and Practice as Research." *Performance Philosophy* 4 no. 2 (2019): 333-334.
- ⁴¹ Kershaw, 64-65.
- ⁴² Ibid, 65.
- ⁴³ Ibid, 64.
- ⁴⁴ Ibid, 66-67.
- ⁴⁵ Pierre Bourdieu and Loïc Wacquant, *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology Paperback*. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1992): 119.
- ⁴⁶ Kershaw, 66.
- ⁴⁷ Rikke Gurgens Gjaerum, "Applied Theatre Research: Discourses in the Field." *European Scientific Journal* 3 (2013): 352.

-
- ⁴⁸ Sally Mackey, "Applied Theatre and Practice as Research: Polyphonic Conversations." *RIDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 21 no. 4 (2016): 482.
- ⁴⁹ Peilin Liang, "Towards docuvention: the multiplicities of documentary practices in Practice as Research (PaR) Applied Theatre." *RIDE: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance* 24 no. 4 (2019): 449.
- ⁵⁰ Shaun May, *Rethinking Practice As Research And The Cognitive Turn*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 8.
- ⁵¹ Jo Ronan, "Principles of Practice." (2020).
<https://www.bloodwatertheatre.co.uk/PoP>.
- ⁵² Hallward, 114-117.
- ⁵³ Alain Badiou and Alberto Toscano, *Handbook of inaesthetics*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005): xiii.
- ⁵⁴ Jo Ronan. "Leave Your Shoes at the Door." (2020).
<https://www.bloodwatertheatre.co.uk/LeaveYourShoesattheDoor>.
- ⁵⁵ Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin M. Bolto, *Drama for learning: Dorothy Heathcote's mantle of the expert approach to education*. (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1995).
- ⁵⁶ Augusto Boal, *Games for Actors and Non Actors*. Translated by Adrian Jackson. (London: Routledge, 1992)
- ⁵⁷ Stephen Ed Kemmis and Robin Ed McTaggart, *The action research planner*. 3rd ed. (Victoria, Australia: Deakin University, 1988): 5.
- ⁵⁸ Smith and Dean, 19.
- ⁵⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. Translated by Richard Nice. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1984): 3.
- ⁶⁰ Jacques Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics*. Translated by Gabriel Rockhill. (London: Continuum, 2004): 13, 90.
- ⁶¹ Robin Nelson, *Practice as Research in the Arts: Principles, Protocols, Pedagogies, Resistances*. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013): 48-70.