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The director's 'I': Theatre, self, and self-study

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This article interrogates the connections between the self-study research methodology and the making of a piece of theatre, and explores ways in which self-study can offer a new arts-based research paradigm for theatre-makers. There are a number of useful parallels to be explored between the self-study project and structures of drama and performance-making. While the methodology is, to a large extent, aimed at teacher educators, we argue that it is sufficiently flexible to be transferable to the context of theatre-making because of the emphasis on practice in both self-study research and theatre. Using the a/r/tographic frame, we explore ways in which the experiential dynamic of both fields offers a unique intersection point from which to generate new thinking. The dialogic necessity of self-study is paralleled by the interactive processes of performance-making – what Marowitz (1978: 49) calls the "actor-director two-step". Hence, the article uses dialogue as a way of demonstrating our thinking-in-action, and reflects the co-created space of learning and knowledge generation. Using self-study to interrogate our own creative work opens up space for new understandings in relation to both the discourse of Drama study and the broader self-study project.

Keywords: Theatre, self-study, dialogue, a/r/tography, hermeneutic spiral, arts-based methods, praxis

Opening thoughts

This article seeks to draw connections between self-study as research method and the artistic practice of making theatre. Therefore, we ask how the model of self-study research can be used to interrogate the process of creating, teaching, and thinking about theatre. We address this question using dialogue as an investigative tool to explore our own practices as directors, teachers, and researchers. The roles we inhabit are not discrete – they overlap, inform one another, bleed into each other,

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and flow together in our work. This intersection has implications for how we imagine and (re)imagine our pedagogic processes.

We view ourselves as belonging to the community of a/r/tographers (Sullivan, 2006), as artists (theatre-makers), researchers (investigators of our theatrical practice) and teachers (facilitators of learning for both our students and ourselves). We seek in our work ways of exploring the dynamic interplay between those functions and methods in the study of our practice that offer potential for understanding the complex steps of our collaborative a/r/tographic dance. Sullivan (2006: 25) offers the following definition of a/r/tography:

> *A/r/tography references the multiple roles of Artist, Researcher and Teacher, as the frame of reference through which art practice is explored as a site for inquiry. A useful way to consider these roles as research practices may be to view the Artist as someone who en-acts and embodies creative and critical inquiry; the Researcher acts in relation to the culture of the research community; and the Teacher re-acts in ways that involve others in artistic inquiry and educational outcomes.*

For us, these ideas connect to the critical notion of praxis, where theory and practice are inextricably linked; the varied acts of making, teaching, and thinking about theatre generate different approaches and necessities, but all are simultaneously and inherently threaded together.

To begin, we need to explain what we mean by the three roles we play. By directing, we mean the selection, development, and mounting of a theatrical piece for performance before an audience. The director's role in contemporary theatre is often considered authorial (Bradby & Williams, 1998), where the director's vision shapes the playwright's text into lived action. No production is thus ever neutral, since every director – consciously or unconsciously – brings his/her own subjectivity to the process.

By teaching, we refer specifically to our roles as teachers of Drama in a higher education institution in South Africa. In our teaching praxis, we are driven by the principles of experiential learning, the integration of theory and practice, and an insistence on active learning.

By research, we mean that we engage reflexively with our own practice, and theorise it. As Philip Taylor (2006: 3) observes:

> *[I]t would be fair to argue that the history of drama education has been driven by a suspicion of researchers and research activity. The attitude that scholarship was located within a rarefied academic domain that bore no resemblance to what actually occurred in classrooms was a dominating one. Drama educators prided themselves on their practice, and those who wanted to theorise about such practice were seen as getting in the way of the real work.*

It is our desire to explore the connections between our practice and our research by examining ourselves as practitioners.

We have found a way to interrogate our a/r/tographic practice using self-study methods. While self-study is a method most often connected with teacher and teacher-educator research, we believe that it can and should be extended into the field of cultural and performance studies.

The self-study 'I'

Self-study has offered a home in which we can explore our practice in a way that recognises the complexity of our selves, and creates space for interrogating how that complexity drives our pedagogic and creative experience. Shaun McNiff (2007: 39) argues that

> *[t]he search for a method, in art and research, is invariably characterized by a crucible of tensions, struggles, a certain degree of chaos, and even the destruction of cherished assumptions. … Invariably the encounter with this experience is the transformative engine that carries the researcher to significant new discoveries.*

The crux of our research question is how to negotiate the tensions and struggles – the chaos – of our a/r/tography. We believe that self-study is one way to embrace the multiple perspectives, knowledges, and knowings reflected in the multidisciplinary nature of theatre practice. As such, it intersects with the practice-as-research trend in theatre studies (Borgdorff, 2011; Fleishman, 2012) which has emerged as practitioners rebel against the idea that knowledge is only created through conventional research methods, and which insists on interrogating practice reflexively.

As a discipline and a cultural form, theatre does not bend itself easily to the confinements of traditional research, given its interdisciplinary, dialogic and collaborative nature. As a seminal theorist of theatre, Edward Gordon Craig (1968: 113-114) notes:

> *The Art of Theatre is neither acting nor the play, it is not the scene nor dance, but it consists of all the elements of which these things are composed: action, which is the very spirit of acting; words, which are the body of the play; line and colour, which are the very heart of the scene; rhythm, which is the very essence of dance. … One is no more important than the other.*

Therefore, traditional research methods are often at odds with the nature of the research that theatre practitioners wish to do, particularly in terms of connecting research to practice. Self-study provides an approach to research that challenges the more rigidly defined traditional paradigmatic parameters, thus opening up new vistas for how to imagine research in creative practices such as theatre-making.

As teachers, we continually ask questions related to what, how and why we teach; we must do the same for our creative practice. Self-study offers a bridge between, and through, the apparently divergent discourses of directing, teaching, and research. This makes it valuable in extending the discourse concerning theatre-making in practice.

Self-study theorists Pinnegar and Hamilton (2011: 345) point to the potential for using self-study in research in Drama and Drama Education:

> *Most self-study inquiry researchers regardless of methodology resonate with the idea that as theater educators develop knowledge useful in understanding and guiding teacher education, such knowledge and understanding should be evident in or based on their practice, submitted to the crucible of public opinion through submission for publications, and contribute and linked to the research conversations in theater teacher education specifically, and teaching and teacher education, generally.*

However, they do not elucidate a specific process or system for engaging in such research. We wish to make a more explicit link, and offer a methodological structure that codifies an approach for researchers of theatre – in all its multiple disciplines – to use.

The methodological 'I'

In constructing this method, we draw primarily on Samaras's (2011: 72) conceptualisation of self-study as a hermeneutic spiral encompassing the following five stages, namely questioning, discovering, framing, reframing, and revisiting. We uncover our deep understandings of Samaras's hermeneutic spiral through dialogue, and go on to demonstrate how to use the concept of the spiral to interrogate examples of our own practice.

The hermeneutic spiral exemplifies Samaras's (2011: 71) construction of the self-study research process as "recursive". The researcher begins from a question or a concern about their practice. In the ensuing discovery and framing phases, the researcher makes discoveries about their practice by reading and examining that practice. Framing allows the researcher to choose the lens(es) through which to analyse his/her practice. However, this is not a linear or formulaic step-by-step approach; rather, the recursive research process allows the researcher to move organically backwards and forwards through the phases, allowing for shifts and changes to happen as the research is reframed and revisited a number of times, and understanding and knowledge is generated.

We can examine our practice of theatre-making in relation to these categories, in terms of both directing productions and writing about them. In writing research about theatre that draws on theatrical modes, we believe that we are writing our theatre practice into our research.

The 'I' in 'We': Thinking through dialogue

We have chosen to engage with our theatrical roots in writing this article. One of the central elements of theatre is dialogue; it is through dialogue that dramatic action evolves, and it is in the dialogic process that ideas are generated and discoveries

revealed. We have, therefore, chosen to write the core of this article as an interactive dialogue, based on recordings of a series of conversations about our work.

In discussing approaches to theatre research, Taylor (2006: 10) argues that "[i]n searching for an authentic portrait of research activity, investigators have begun to explore non-linear modes of representing data". For us, using dialogue creates space for interactive learning and multivocality, reflecting the dialogic nature of theatre and self-study (self in relation to other). In our working process as directors, teachers and writers, we habitually solve problems, answer questions, make discoveries and clarify thinking by means of dialogue. We wished to explore whether we could translate this practice into a research technique and a means of representing our thought process in action. In our dialogue, we are attempting, as Taylor (2006: 12) urges, "to struggle with the many perspectives and voices while acknowledging the contradictory tensions that often power the human experience".

The decision to utilise a dialogic frame within a self-study process is not unique to us: we came across it as a methodology in our reading (De Lange & Grossi, 2009), and it is increasingly recognised as a format associated with self-study practice. In this and our own process, dialogue functions both as a way of generating data and as a method of data analysis (Coia & Taylor, 2009: 14; East, Fitzgerald & Heston, 2009: 69). In choosing to reflect this in our writing, we also wished to depict the nature of our collaborative practice: we direct together, often teach together, write together, and research together. Our collaboration operates in a dynamic, co-owned space, which we want reflected in our writing. Thus, we can depend on both professional (East *et al.,* 2009: 61) and personal intimacy as friends as the basis for our dialogue. In this way, it is hoped that we find, as Carroll (1996: 72) observes, "another way of researching drama that tries to avoid cutting up the creative processes of drama and research into cling-wrapped packages of dead experience".

Opening our directorial 'I's

Our dialogic interplay begins with the question of how to connect our theatre selves with our self-study selves.

> ***Tanya:*** *We could use Samaras' [s] (2011: 72) concept of the "hermeneutic spiral", and look at our process of directing through that lens.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *Well, questioning corresponds to selecting a text.*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *We choose a text because it answers – or it asks – a question about something.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *Something that is significant for* ***you****, yes.*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *Discovering is about textual analysis, understanding the background and context of the play, and making discoveries in the rehearsal room.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *Framing would be how it is all put together – conceptualising and putting the piece on stage.*

Tanya: *And then reframing – because in rehearsal everything shifts.*

Tamar: *We constantly adjust and improvise; but also, when we analyse and reflect, we are reframing it in a different way, so there's a dual level.*

Tanya: *This connects to revisiting, which happens throughout, and at the end.*

Tamar: *And these are not self-contained elements; they overlap continually, creating what Pinnegar and Hamilton (2010: 107) call an "iterative process".*

Tanya: *We can also see quite clearly what Samaras (2011: 11) calls a "transparent and systematic research process".*

Tamar: *Like theatre, self-study is participatory in the sense that it's experiential – you have to* ***do*** *it; dialogic in the sense that it's generated in relation to other; and transformational in the sense that it's change-oriented, that it's seeking improvement.*

Tanya: *Samaras (2011: 81) calls it a "change journey". She is also insistent that reflections generated through self-study have to be shared and made public (Samaras, 2011: 82), which links to the idea that the thinking of theatre is worthless unless it is made public.*

Tamar: *True, one's directorial practice is only realised finally in the action of the performed play. It is an innately public representation.*

Tanya: *We could say that theatre is enacted thinking.*

The notion of enacted and embodied thinking is critical, because it relates to the distinctive component of theatre, its 'liveness', and its insistence on direct interaction between performer and audience. Many theorists of theatre have established this principle (Grotowksi, 1968; Brook, 1968). It is always both inward-looking (the actor) and outward-looking (the audience). This parallels the self-study imperative of self in relation to other:

Tamar: *Peter Brook says the core of theatre is making the invisible visible (1968: 47) – making the thinking visible.*

Tanya: *That parallels in many ways the self-study imperative to reveal, or to expose – what Samaras (2011: 80) calls making transparent.*

Tamar: *So we could argue that the whole process of making a production is a hermeneutic cycle, and each element, every rehearsal, each day of that process, and the performance itself, is continually iterative, never the same.*

Tanya: *It's also critical to understand that each stage of the cycle is not a contained experience with clear borderlines. The stages all overlap, and, while we can trace an overall evolution, each moment itself contains questions, discoveries, framings, reframings, and revisitings.*

Tamar: *So, we can use the hermeneutic spiral in relation to our own work, to show how the phases of directing parallel that spiral in practice.*

The hermeneutic spiral in action – from the directors' 'I'

Having appropriated Samaras's spiral as a methodological tool, our dialogue next focuses on analysing our artistic practice, considering two concrete examples from our practice, and applying the analytical lens outlined earlier.

FrontLines[1] was the first inter-institutional production between the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Drama and Performance Studies programme and the Drama Department of the Durban University of Technology (DUT). The project is a devised theatre production that seeks to explore the horror of the experience of war from multiple individual perspectives, including combatants and civilians, in order to foreground the need to prevent such conflicts through understanding our shared humanity. It was originally performed in 2009 at the Elizabeth Sneddon Theatre and has subsequently had three further iterations.

Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses* (1996) was produced in 2011, again as an inter-institutional project. The play is based on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and is constructed episodically with a series of separate stories linked together through the central motif of a swimming pool on stage.

> ***Tanya:*** *Let's begin with questioning; when, as directors, we choose a text, the process involves deriving a question from the material, or having a question and finding material that allows it to be addressed.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *In Metamorphoses (1996), for example, we were asking a question about how to realise Greek mythological narratives in action, specifically in our own context.*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *The play involved a large number of people – we had 64 cast members[2] as well as a large technical team – and it has a unique staging challenge, in that it requires a swimming pool on stage, which the actors move in and out of during the action.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *FrontLines was a piece that we created from scratch, and it arose out of very personal responses and our own family history.[3] There was a desire to respond to something profoundly personal – our own grandparents' experience of war – and also to something that matters to us morally and socially in the world. It also offered us a way to bring students from our different institutions together to work on a project – something we'd been talking about for a while and something no one had ever done before.*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *Discoveries are then made in response to the core question/s, and they continue to be made throughout the rehearsal experience.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *In FrontLines those discoveries included structural and performative aspects. In developing the text we discovered that letters and testimony offered a way to portray the multiple narratives in which we were interested. Stylistically we explored different performance techniques and playing choices to create a collage effect, drawing on text, music, song, dance, and images to portray the multiple narratives. The major discovery was how the non-linear, achronological, layered, fragmented form could convey something larger than the sum of the parts.*

Tanya: *The discovery experience in Metamorphoses was different, because working with an existing text is very different from the devising process. Here the discoveries concern how to realise conceptual ideas in action. This text had a particular technical challenge (the swimming pool), and we also had to think carefully about how to get students involved in narratives that were largely removed from their own lives, to find a way to connect them to the stories in the present moment. Significantly, in both instances, the discoveries occur because of how the questions generate choices, and the demands those choices make on our directorial actions.*

Tamar: *The next phase is framing, which is about making directorial and conceptual choices, and determining how you are going to construct the text for reception. Frames are generated from discoveries made in response to the questions asked. As a director, interpretation of any text is about choosing an aspect on which to focus, or framing the question that you as a director want to use the text to ask. This is what theatre director, playwright and critic Charles Marowitz (1986: 32) calls the director's "interpretive wand", the thing that gives the production its unique – and personal – quality.*

Tanya: *With Metamorphoses we were concerned with the idea of telling old stories in new ways. We also had to think about using stage space, actors, costumes, and light, all the elements of the theatre, in completely new ways, because of the central element of the water on stage. Because the text poses a dual problem, as a director you have to set up a dual conceptualisation, for both the text and the staging.*

Tamar: *Much of the framing in FrontLines was about actually making the text, and selecting which pieces we wanted to use from the vast body of material we had found. We needed to make choices about which stories to tell, which voices to show, and find ways to make them cohere. That was also the stylistic challenge – how to make it aesthetically coherent and construct a performance narrative from something that is not linear; how to answer the challenge of how to physicalise non-fictional, often static material – letters, testimony, eye-witness reports, and the like – and make it active and performative.*

Tanya: *Reframing is about what happens in the rehearsal process. When you go into rehearsal, you as the director have all these ideas in your head, but then there are other people in the room who bring their own ideas, so rehearsal is about constant rethinking, questioning, and shifting of decisions already made.*

Tamar: *And rehearsal is also the place where the spontaneous creativity and 'Aha' moments happen. So in rehearsal we are engaged in a continuous cycle of reframing, still in answer to the original question and driven by the discoveries and choices you've made.*

Tanya: *For Metamorphoses, a big challenge was when we moved from the rehearsal studio into the theatre space. Dealing with the water in reality meant that many of the staging choices we had already made changed and evolved.*

Tamar: *With FrontLines each of the four different productions has had a very different look and feel, as we have had to reframe our response to the same basic questions. Partly this has been because the production has happened in three very different venues, and the visual aesthetic is determined by the constraints of the space. Shifting the space means shifting the frame, both physically and conceptually.*

> ***Tanya:*** *The last step is revisiting, which is about the continual process of reflecting. Every rehearsal, every performance ends with reflection, through the process of giving notes as the director, in fixing and rethinking scenes that are not working, in planning the next day's rehearsal or the next night's performance.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *The process, like self-study, is iterative, reflexive, and never complete. Essentially, when we reflect on the work, we ask ourselves: what am I doing, what is the audience receiving, what is the interplay between the two, and what is happening to my own practice as a result of this composite experience?*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *So what we are doing here is applying Samaras'[s] hermeneutic spiral to a process that we intuitively and experientially understand, as a lens through which to understand the process of directorial choice, conceptualisation, implementation, and performance.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *It's a lens that fits very well. The challenge with theatre-making is that it's both an intellectual and conceptual process, but also a practical one, and as such is quite difficult to research, because it operates on multiple planes of experience. Self-study offers a way to negotiate those different planes, because it allows you as the researcher to look at what you think, but also what you do.*

These examples of the hermeneutic spiral in action illustrate how the spiral can operate as a theoretical and methodological lens through which to view practice, allowing the creative artist to interrogate his/her own practice *in* practice.

Finding the 'I' in teaching

The next element in our study is to explore the pedagogic implications of these discoveries, by connecting what we do as artists with our philosophies of teaching:

> ***Tamar:*** *For me, the most important aspect of teaching theatre is that it is fundamentally praxis based. Much of the challenge of teaching theatre in a university has to do with negotiating the often uneasy dynamic between theory and practice (Brannen, 2004).*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *That's why self-study, with its focus on the engagement – and improvement – of practice, offers a profoundly important potential to find ways to weave these two things together. For me, it is connected to Freire's (1972) notion of praxis.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *What's exciting is that the self-study window affords a glimpse into ways to connect with ideas not traditionally part of Drama teaching but which offer useful additions to the teaching arsenal.*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *Absolutely. But it's also about examining how our teaching practice parallels what we do as directors – ask questions, frame approaches, make discoveries, reflect on the learning, and figure out where to go next – the same spiral drives the teaching process. And sometimes the teaching and the directing happen simultaneously.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *For me it's also fundamentally about the purpose of education – and particularly Drama education. I think it connects to bell hooks' notion of "engaged pedagogy" (1994); drama becomes a tool for the development of life skills, of creative, confident, and critically engaged students.*

> ***Tanya:*** *Yes, because in making theatre we are offering a Freirean (1972) problem-posing sequence in action, which can generate new choices and new understandings of ourselves, our world, and ourselves in that world.*
>
> ***Tamar****: Like theatre, teaching is also, I think, highly individualistic. Live theatre relies on present-tense, living input of creative artists in action. Teaching is similarly present-tense and reliant on active engagement in the moment of the teacher-learner interaction. Thus, both offer a clear canvas on which to imprint a self-study approach.*

This suggests the efficacy of self-study as a tool for the individual teacher or director to make explicit their practice and, by so doing, both improve their own practice and contribute to the development of the discipline and the art. Understanding our practice creates new knowledge about the practice of theatre teaching, thus impacting on both the creative and pedagogic spheres.

Expanding the self-study 'I'

The third aspect is to connect these ideas to our research practice. This involves understanding the expanded reach of the self-study project beyond teacher education, and the recognition that the inherent individuality of the theatre-making process as well as its public-making imperative resonate with the self-study model in ways that are profoundly useful.

Theatre research is easily understood within the well-established arts-based research model. Leavy (2009: ix) explains that arts-based research

> *practices have emerged out of the natural affinity between research practice and artistic practice, both of which can be viewed as crafts (original emphasis). Drawing on the capabilities of the creative arts, ABR (sic) practices offer qualitative researchers alternatives to traditional research methods and methodologies.*

Such a challenge to the hegemony of traditional research is important for those of us working in the creative arts that grapple with the apparently contradictory demands of our creative and academic functions.

The difficulty in theorising creative practice lies in its somewhat mystical motivations. As Sullivan (2006: 26-27) observes:

> *What artists do of course is to make art, and as an object and subject of study art has been well picked over by aestheticians, historians, psychologists, sociologists, critics, and cultural commentators for a long time. But what artists do in the practice of creating artworks, and the processes, products, proclivities, and contexts that support this activity is less well studied from the perspective of the artist. As an "insider" the artist has mostly been content to remain a silent participant, even if the inquiring eye of interested others has given plenty of insights into artistic experiences and activities.*

Thus, we seek a way to voice the insider perspective, to render visible the apparently invisible working processes of the creative process. In this instance, we are attempting

to shift the parameters of what constitutes arts-based research a little further, and to elucidate more explicitly the synergies between self-study and arts-based research:

> ***Tanya:*** *We must differentiate between what is known as arts-based research and what we are articulating. Arts-based methodologies generally (Samaras, 2011; De Lange & Grossi, 2009; Leavy, 2009; Sullivan, 2006) use artistic practice as a means to address a research question. We want to use self-study as a methodology to excavate the process of making a piece of art (in this instance, theatre).*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *Our suggestion is that self-study offers a set of tools that can be used to understand and interrogate the process of creating a piece of art for reception – the focus is thus on the artefact itself and how it is generated, who is the maker, how does the maker's own knowledge impact on the creation of the art[e]fact vs using the art[e]fact as a tool to access knowledge about something else.*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *In self-study, too, the knowledge that is produced is situated and local (LaBoskey, 2004: 843); it is thus context-specific. Productions are also context-specific, situated and local because they are rooted in the doing and the making of the people involved. Self-study thus can operate as a research methodology for theatre with the end purpose of a different kind of knowledge creation.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *It offers a different way of writing about theatre. Rather than writing a literary analysis of a play text, a review of a production, or even a directorial concept, there's writing about the self* ***in*** *the production.*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *It enables us to take the knowledge that is intrinsic, that is evident in that particular production, and make it public. As LaBoskey (in Pinnegar & Hamilton, 2010: 99) says, the embodied knowledge leads to the public knowledge through cycles of critical reflection: doing, and reflecting, and changing, and doing again. By going through that cycle, what you know in your bones becomes public knowledge through the sharing of what you know.*

Sullivan (2006: 32) suggests that "it is the creation of new opportunities to see beyond what is known that has the potential to lead to the creation of new knowledge". This is the potential for self-study research in/through/with theatre practice.

Back to ourselves – the dialogic 'I'

Finally, we wish to reflect on how the dialogic project in writing this article has impacted on both our practice and our pedagogy. Our attempt to expand the relevance and applicability of self-study to theatre arose because of the questions emerging from our own struggles to negotiate the dynamic between our theatre practice, our teaching practice and our research practice – the a/r/tographer's dilemma. The dialogue has offered us a way to express the polyvocal nature of our thinking:

> ***Tamar:*** *In writing dialogically we have foregrounded the process inherent in our collaborative self-study.*

> ***Tanya:*** *It's like our collaborative working practice; we operate from a fundamental willingness to abandon the self in the pursuit of shared and communicated understanding.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *And that is paralleled in our theatre practice. Of course, this is partly due to familiarity, because we have worked together enough that we have come to understand each other's thinking processes in action; but it's also about a shared way of thinking. I think this also is important for the self-study project, because our work seems to embody the notion of the critical friend (Samaras, 2011).*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *Our ideas, our work and our concepts are constantly being tested against each other's – this is sometimes uncomfortable and contested, but it is not contentious.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *This stems from our fundamental understanding of theatre as a collaborative and essentially generous act. In making theatre, we are always sharing of ourselves and our worldview, and it seems only natural to extend that into the teaching and research arenas.*
>
> ***Tanya:*** *We have been trained to work together rather than in isolation. All theatrical action is dialogic; interaction is required to build conflict (the basis of all theatre), and relationship is critical in the unfolding of narrative.*
>
> ***Tamar:*** *This mindset resonates with self-study as a more appropriate research approach for this art form than trying to mould a fundamentally communal and creative experience into a singular and solitary frame.*

In discussing the creative process, McNiff (2007: 40) suggests that

> *the most meaningful insights often come by surprise, unexpectedly, and even against the will of the creator. The artist may have a sense or intuition of what might be discovered or of what is needed, and in some cases even a conviction, but the defining aspect of knowing through art … is the emanation of meaning through the process of creative expression.*

This encapsulates what happens in the directorial creative process, and it also points to the power of the dialogic initiative – to map out through the dialogue a path to understanding, where discoveries are made through the process rather than being reported simply out of the process. We thus write ourselves more fully – and more directly – into our collaborative self-study of our practice.

Concluding thoughts

This article set out to answer a particular question about the potential for new kinds of knowledge to emerge from the dialogue between self-study research and theatre-making. We believe that our own a/r/tographic practice demonstrates the power of this connection, drawing the threads of our theatre, research and teaching practices together. The elasticity of the self-study model allows us to move its usage beyond teacher education into other fields based on interrogation of the fundamental principle of practice at work, and thus to cross and re-cross the metaphoric bridges between the three aspects of our practice.

In seeking to frame a methodology that integrates self-study, arts-based and theatre research into an investigatory model, we are focusing on, as McNiff (2007: 33) suggests:

> *the creation of a clear method that can be easily described and then implemented in a systematic way that lends itself to the reporting of outcomes. Ideally, the method can be replicable and utilized by other researchers who may want to explore the problem separately. Experimentation with the method and learning more about it can even be a primary outcome of the research and an aide to future professional applications.*

In this way, we can begin to build a new – and creatively engaged – research paradigm for the arts. Self-study offers a way to integrate theory and practice in profound ways that (re)invent and (re)invest creative disciplines such as Drama in terms of what, and how, we name 'research'. Such work also extends the boundaries of the self-study paradigm, opening up whole new fields of study which may benefit from its inward/outward focus and its recognition of the value of personal knowledge in the construction, transmission and reading of discourses in any given discipline. The spaces between making, researching and teaching theatre are an a/r/tographic landscape of possibilities which facilitate, as Sullivan (2006: 32) puts it:

> *moving in and beyond the comfort of prescribed discipline knowledge, as issues and concerns demand approaches where new perspectives are opened up. Consequently it is the creation of new opportunities to see beyond what is known that has the potential to lead to the creation of new knowledge.*

Such a process engages the heart of theatre-making, research and teaching, all of which seek to imagine new possibilities of human endeavour.

Endnotes

1. We have written extensively about this project in other papers (see Meskin & Van der Walt, 2010a, 2010b; Coetzee, Meskin & Van der Walt, 2014).
2. A cast of ten performed the original production and each actor played multiple roles; we expanded the cast to accommodate the large number of students who wanted to participate. This was possible because of the episodic nature of the text.
3. Both of us had grandfathers who fought and were prisoners of war in World War II, and this personal history had a significant impact on how the production was constructed.

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