

# The Hospital Scene: Deepening Democracy with Theatre-led Inquiry

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**Abstract:** This chapter proposes one way of building democracy through theatre. The empirical content is drawn from a workshop conducted in Greece 2019, at a conference dedicated to performance activism worldwide (“Play Perform Learn Grow,” 2019). Performance activism draws upon the human capacity to play, create and perform, the premise being that people – even if their economic, social and/or political interests are in conflict – can create new relationships, new activities and new ways of moving forward together. The aim of the workshop was to allow a creative conversation that would unpack multiple ways of creating understanding from a real-life incident from rural Uganda, in which a pregnant woman was refused help to give birth at a clinic. Theoretically framed within Brechtian thinking and the concept of deep democracy as introduced by Amy and Arnold Mindell (Amy Mindell, 2008), the chapter argues that the theatre-led inquiry contributed to destabilise customised thinking and provide potential for multifaceted thinking and awareness. In this way, the workshop design enabled complex and embodied ways of reflecting, providing an example of how to build and deepen democracy through theatre.

**Keywords:** performance activism, Bertolt Brecht, deep democracy, theatre-led inquiry, creative conversation

## Introduction

The image of a young woman in labour – dying – strikes like an arrow through the flesh and bones of my body. I see her on the floor in front of

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me – at the entrance to the clinic, the nurse refusing to treat her because she does not have the money to pay. The unborn child dies with her. For one moment, I feel exposed and vulnerable. Then I compose myself and move on as facilitator. This is what I experienced in a split second while co-facilitating a drama workshop at an international conference in Thessaloniki in 2019. In this chapter, I will analyse and discuss the themes that arose from the workshop that investigated a real-life story from rural Uganda, the hospital scene, about a young woman in labour who died after she was refused treatment because she could not pay the fee as the hospital rules demanded. The aim of the workshop was to explore ways of applying theatre-led inquiry for experiential learning and new insight.

The legacy of theatre as a vehicle for change represents experimental avant-garde theatre as well as educational and therapeutic traditions. Shapes and forms vary, yet there seems to be a renewed interest currently in exploring the coming together of performance practices in the arts and in everyday life (see for example Citron et al., 2014; Jennings & Holmwood, 2016). At the same time, Western notions of democracy are under pressure and grassroots initiatives outside the conventional political sphere are emerging worldwide. One of these is performance activism that originates from the US, inspired by radical performance practice and studies from the 1970s and onwards (Friedman & Holzman, 2014). Performance activism draws upon the human capacity to play, create and perform. The premise is that people – even if their economic, social and/or political interests are in conflict – can create new relationships, new activities and new ways of moving forward together.

This chapter argues that the theatre-led inquiry demonstrated in the workshop accords with performance activism because of the joint objective to challenge habitual thinking and action patterns, and to foster creative conversations that accommodate awareness of diversity and oppression. The chapter is arranged as follows. First, the background and context of the workshop is presented. Then, the theoretical framework is introduced, combining Bertolt Brecht's theatre of everyday life (Brecht et al., 1976) and Arnold and Amy Mindell's concept of deep democracy (Amy Mindell, 2008). Thereafter, the practice-led methodology and the performative research design are presented. In the main body of the

chapter, I analyse and discuss the workshop through the lens of the theoretical framework, before the conclusion that sums up the outcome in the light of the performative research paradigm and the aspiration of building and deepening democracy through theatre.

## Background and context

The choice of story stemmed from an online course on social therapeutics and performance activism hosted by the East Side Institute in New York (“East Side Institute”, 2020). Drawn from theories of Lev Vygotsky and Ludwig Wittgenstein, the East Side Institute has developed radical approaches to bringing human and community development to the forefront of culture change (Holzman, 2018). My co-facilitator, David Keir Wright, joined the course with other international students. One of them was David Kawanuka from Uganda, who worked for Hope for Youth Uganda, a non-profit organization that supports youth and vulnerable children by addressing education and health issues (“Hope for Youth Uganda,” 2020). During the online course, stories from their realities and experiences were shared by the participants, and these often depicted challenging conditions in deprived communities. Kawanuka, unable to join on zoom, shared the story from his community in the outskirts of Kampala in an email. The encounter between the young woman in labour and the nurse refusing to help her had made a strong impression on him, and his sharing it sparked off a whole range of thoughts and feelings for us as listeners, such as questions around differences, power relations, health education, ethics, policies and the need for meaning and hope. For me personally, this included a biased sense of indignation that generated my curiosity and motivation to work in more depth with the story. Its microcosmic specificity seemed to represent a bigger reality, like a macro-cosmos, that put forward dilemmas and questions that would be interesting to investigate further through drama- and theatre-based action methods.

The opportunity to do so presented itself at the conference *Play, Perform, Learn, Grow: Bridging Communities, Practices and the World* (“Play Perform Learn Grow,” 2019).

The first *Play, Perform, Learn, Grow (PPLG)* gathering took place in 2017 in response to the refugee crisis, and was supported by the East Side Institute, by Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and by Lesvos Solidarity. Stimulating community creativity, *PPLG* aims to create places of belonging across national, ideological and social borders and embrace cultural diversity through its focus on play and ritual. The initiative was impacted in its creation by performance activism and drama and movement therapy. It ignited a collective movement, nourishing home-grown initiatives and creating new spaces of belonging across borders and cultures. The focus of the 2019 conference was “the exploration of methodologies that support educational, therapeutic, academic, artistic and community initiatives to discover dialectics in between polarities, capture complexities, articulate and perform new kinds of relationships” (“Play Perform Learn Grow,” 2019). After Kawanuka had granted us permission to use his story, we submitted a proposal for a workshop, “Unpacking unheard voices through participatory drama”. At the same time, we followed up the contact with Kawanuka and the conference organizers, and, helped by their efforts, it became possible for Kawanuka to join us in Thessaloniki and take part in the workshop. At the start of the conference, we finally met in person in the park at Anatolia College to go through the final preparations. Beforehand, we had given him the session plan and now we went through the stages of the workshop. We agreed that he would join the workshop as a participant with no other prepared task than playing the drum during the warm-up. However, the ethical awareness of his special role was pertinent, as the original teller of the story from his personal experience. He was the key human link to the tragedy at the clinic. As facilitators, we brought this awareness with us into the workshop.

## Theoretical framework

This chapter addresses and reflects on practice that explored the coming together of performance practices in the arts and in everyday life. The theoretical framework therefore draws from theatre studies and process-oriented psychology. In his dramaturgical poem “On everyday

theatre”, Brecht put a street accident forward as a basic model for an epic theatre – a model he developed theoretically in the essay “The street scene” (Brecht, 1964; Brecht et al., 1976, pp. 176–179). In the poem the witness of a street accident demonstrates, as an actor-storyteller, how the accident happened. From a third person’s perspective, he describes the actions of the driver and the actions of the old man who was hit – the point being that the accident could also *not* have happened. For the exploration of the hospital scene, this was relevant because it puts forward the Brechtian claim that human beings are social beings with choices – hence they could have chosen otherwise (White, 2004). Brecht does not bring in the term democracy, but the notion of democratic practice is present throughout the poem, with the main image of the street as stage and shared social space. Brecht scholar John White points out its efficiency through means of rhetorical antitheses, such as temple vs. street; cloistered theatre vs. real life outside (White, 2004, p. 166). This indicates the stage as a communal space for exchange of stories on street level, meaning on *equal* level, and it brings together performance practices on stage and in life. Acting here means to engage in the world with the purpose of social investigation – together.

The distancing or estrangement encouraged by Brecht was also relevant because of its invitation to allowing complex and dialectical thinking – in line with the workshop objectives – to investigate the story from different angles and perspectives. Brecht writes that the aim of the estrangement is to portray human social incidents as “something striking, something that calls for explanation” and “not to be taken for granted, not just natural” (Brecht, 1964, p. 125). By “the direct changeover from representation to commentary” (Brecht, 1964, p. 126), Brecht wants “to allow the spectator to criticize constructively from a social point of view” (Brecht, 1964, p. 125). This stance seems somewhat old-fashioned today, unless the critical lens is also held up towards the staging procedures of the workshop itself and looks at them as “something striking” that embeds interests, power structures and intentions – both conscious and unconscious ones. For the analysis of the workshop and a closer, critical look at how it was intended and worked, this critical lens was useful because it revealed underlying and tacit relations that it was important to make explicit, such

as my sudden emotional response described in the introduction, and my indignation and disgust when hearing the story for the first time.

To cater for these more intuitive, sensory and feeling responses, it seemed therefore appropriate to bring in the notion of deep democracy from the field of process-oriented psychology, which represents a deepening of democracy beyond classical democracy, which has focused on majority rule (Green, 1999; Amy Mindell, 2008; Arnold Mindell, 1992). Deep democracy involves an increased awareness of how we as individuals and communities listen to each other's lived experience and diversity of voices, conscious and unconscious, explicit and tacit, including deconstructing the power relations of rank (Fernández-Aballí, 2016, p. 373). By focusing on awareness of diversity of rank and privilege in discursive interactions, it is used in international peace work and collective healing work in post-war zones (Audergon & Arye, 2005). Deep democracy merges psychology, the arts and politics, and seemed particularly significant in the context of performance activism because it filters through the private and public spheres of life and supports critical reflection of action. It was appropriate for the workshop investigation because it invites storytelling arising from within the phenomenological body as well as the kind of storytelling that Brecht advocates, prompted critically. Amy Mindell states that deep democracy brings democracy "to life *in the moment* as a living reality" by summing up that "[o]nly when all aspects of an experience are unfolded with awareness does the wisdom embedded in the experience reveal itself most fully" (Amy Mindell, 2008, p. 213). This assumption will be inquired into below. What kind of wisdom was revealed during the workshop, and what kind of transformation, if any, was at stake?

## Methodology

The purpose of the workshop was two-fold. On the one hand, the aim was to unpack and explore some of the not-yet imaged stories generated from the antagonistic situation in the hospital scene. On the other hand, the objective was to propose a theatre-led inquiry that would allow the diversity of mainstream and marginalized perspectives to co-exist and interact – even if they should reveal uncomfortable power structures and emotional responses.

This dual and performative approach is in line with “practice as research in the arts” (Nelson, 2013). Robin Nelson proposes a model mapping the creative research process in cycles of transforming subjective know-how and tacit knowledge into explicit and contextualized knowledge available to many (Nelson, 2013, p. 37). Estelle Barnett proposes that all artists-researchers validate their research by questioning themselves: “What new knowledge/understandings did the studio enquiry and methodology generate that may not have been revealed through other research approaches?” (Barrett & Bolt, 2007, p. 1). In this kind of performative research, the expressive forms of research work performatively, which means that the research may inaugurate movement and transformation, much in line with Mindell’s claim of potential emergence of group wisdom (Amy Mindell, 2008, p. 213). Brad Haseman writes that “[i]t not only expresses the research, but in that expression becomes the research itself” (Haseman, 2014, p. 150). This resonates with the intentions and thinking behind the workshop, where it was the practice itself that generated the outcome.

The workshop design was carefully planned in six stages: focus, warm-up, bridge-in, main event, bridge-out and grounding – the intention being that each exercise would reveal new layers of stories to emerge. This structured design followed the dramaturgy of a ritual and represents a key element in the training and practice of the Sesame Approach to dramatherapy, in which I was trained at the Royal Central School of Speech and Drama in London 2005–2007 (Bruun, 2012; Hougham, 2006; Pearson et al., 2013). The six stages build up from the focus, warm-up and bridge-in to the main event that represents the anti-structure of the ritual where liminality and a state of *betwixt-and-between* may challenge habitual thinking and feeling responses, and in turn, when addressed in the bridge-out, may inspire new patterns to emerge. To wind down and return to the “reality”, the bridge-out, therefore, in this Jungian-based approach, is essential because staying with the ambivalence of the experiential exploration during the main event may provide potential new insights and transformative learning, individually and collectively. Finally, the here-and-now reality is reinforced, making sure that everybody is grounded before the session ends. The potential for transformation and new insight is embedded in this kind of ritualistic structure that

goes well with the performative research paradigm. Barbara Bolt argues that “the performative needs to be understood in terms of the performative *force* of art, that is, its capacity to effect ‘movement’ in thought, word and deed in the individual and social sensorium” (Bolt, 2016, p. 130). With the objective to explore how to stimulate new reflexive awareness of personal and cultural bias, this would mean, in Bolt’s understanding, that the workshop outcome could only be validated by how the group would be *moved* by the experience of the arts practice as a collaborative and relational performative event in the here and now.

## The workshop – analysis and discussion

The 90-minute workshop took place on Sunday morning 6<sup>th</sup> October 2019. In addition to Kawanuka, my co-facilitator Wright, and myself, six female conference delegates attended – their ages ranging from mid-twenties to fifty plus, representing several parts of the world, Sweden/Ireland, Norway/Austria, South America and the US. The analysis and discussion of the workshop has four sections: stepping into the story, dwelling in the story (main event), stepping out and moving on.

### Stepping into the story

After a short informal presentation of all present, Kawanuka played soft rhythms on an African djembe while the rest of the group moved around, at first individually, then meeting and greeting each other, moving around to the rhythms, arriving energetically in the same space and collectively creating focus. Then, in a standing circle, the bridge-in exercise, floating sculptures, was introduced: one person A creates a body-shape inside the circle and the next person B responds with another shape. When both sculptures are still, there is a moment of observing and sensing the relationship of the two before A withdraws, leaving B alone before the next person C responds with his or her body-shape. The rationale was to prepare the participants for the creative exploration of the story during the main event. The five themes were chosen beforehand with the intention to start unpacking the complexity of perspectives:



*plea for help* (the dying woman/victim),

*rejection* (the nurse/oppressor),

*despair* (victim, family, community, and potentially including oppressor),

*grief* (family, community, and potentially oppressor)

*consolation* (family, community, and potentially oppressor).

When the group investigated the themes as floating sculpts, several versions of each theme emerged, often with two body-shapes expressing the same feelings but in different ways and with a variety of intensity, or expressing opposite feelings, which was most pertinent with the theme *rejection*, where the antagonistic relationship was shown in different ways. This bridge-in was mainly intended to raise the group's awareness and evoke affective responses to the themes, but it also had another purpose – to demonstrate through practice that everyone would have their own response and creative imagination, and that these were equally valid. It was also a way to underpin Brecht's theatre of everyday life because everyone present embodied the roles of actor-storyteller and witness (Brecht et al., 1976). The multiple versions of each theme started the creative conversation in the group by evoking everyone's personal experience and imagination. The floating sculpts induced a variety of feeling responses and, in concordance with deep democracy, the idea was to let all the feeling responses be of equal value, having the same right to be expressed and voiced (Amy Mindell, 2008). It was important to introduce this non-hierarchical mindset experientially during this phase of the workshop before the main event. It seemed to work well and create a collective awareness of ability to move to the next stage of the workshop with embodied curiosity and playfulness.

## Main event: dwelling in the story

In the main event the group explored the scene together in three rounds based on initial pair work. The six female participants paired up with each other and Wright paired up with Kawanuka. Each pair was asked to create a sculpt together of the climax of the scene and the four sculpts were then shown one by one. The antagonism between the woman and the nurse was clear in all versions, but the woman in labour was shown

in different ways, from lying down, to kneeling, and to standing, while expressing agony, pain and her plea for help. The nurse stood in all versions with a clear body language of rejection, expressing disgust, power and determination. The exploration then continued with the whole group focusing on one sculpt at a time. With the first two sculptures the group was asked to voice out loud the two characters' feelings and thoughts. This exploration resulted in lines, such as:

*Nurse: Why is this woman bothering me? I must follow the rules of the hospital, [it is] that simple! If not, I lose my job. There are too many other patients here, I cannot make an exception with her.*

*Woman in labour: What is the matter with you? Please, help me, my child will die. My husband will soon be here, I know, you must help me. How can you be so cruel? I do not want to die.*

With the third sculpt, the group was invited to voice what the two characters did not dare to say out loud. This resulted in lines, such as:

*Nurse: Why do these young women get pregnant all the time? She should have been more careful. I am tired of this work. Nothing we do seems to help. We need more staff. I am exhausted from this work. She has put it on herself by getting pregnant with such a man. It is not my concern.*

*Woman: She thinks she is better than me for having an education. Why isn't my husband here? It is not fair that I go through this. I am not a person to her. I hate people like her. Only living by the rules and regulations, without empathy. Why can't she think for herself? She should not be a nurse!*

In this round, new voices arose from the young woman that seemed to set the scene within the larger African social context, as imagined by the group, of general female conditions relating to education, (early?) pregnancy and dependency on men. The severe standpoint of the nurse was loosened when more nuances around her working conditions and expectations as a nurse were revealed.

These rounds of exploring the climax of the scene brought out expected responses along with more unexpected ones, including empathy with the nurse. As a result the exercise allowed the mainstream and marginalized

voices of the group to interact and co-exist in a creative conversation in line with the notion of deep democracy that “sees the emotional experience at the margins of group life as potentially transformative” (Audergon & Arye, 2005, p. 113). I would not claim that the exercise was transformative for the short-lived workshop group at this point but working with the sculptors like this served the purpose of letting new, more surprising, perspectives come forward. There seemed to be a shift of group perspective that lifted the lens from each participant’s personal responses to an enhanced awareness of the context and its difficult conditions.

### Stepping out of the story

After the main event, the process of stepping away from the dramatic scene started. At this point, my co-facilitator and I had chosen *not* to encourage the participants to emotionally identify further with the dying woman, but rather encourage affective distance, as advocated by the Brechtian notion of estrangement (Brecht, 1964). Still, it seemed appropriate to acknowledge that there would have been a burial in the community and, rather ironically, this was when the vivid image of the dead woman struck me as real, and de-stabilized me emotionally for a few seconds. The charge of the moment seemed to raise not only my awareness, but also the whole group’s awareness of the specificity of the story context and the significance of it being brought to us by Kawanuka from his community – a community shared with the woman *and* the nurse. The shared experience of this moment seemed to create a deeper group awareness amongst us that somehow mirrored the realities of pain and frustration within the event itself. It can be understood as a transformative moment for the group, in line with deep democracy raising awareness of diversity, rank and privilege in discursive interactions (Fernández-Aballí, 2016, p. 361). It also somehow seemed to honour the story and the realities of it. This made a difference for the last part of the workshop and its outcome.

For the last exercise, the four pairs were asked to imagine a new character and create a first-person monologue from this character’s perspective sometime after the burial. The new characters were:

*the sister of the pregnant woman,  
her husband,  
a junior nurse/witness to the event,  
a doctor/owner of the clinic.*

The pairs worked on their own for about ten minutes and when presenting the monologues everybody wanted to take part. Eight chairs were set up in a square with two chairs on each side, back to back. In this way, each pair spoke out into the space while the other pairs could listen as witnesses with open or closed eyes. The four monologues created new experiential perspectives related to the scene, based on the participants' imagination and what they brought to the workshop of their personal assumptions. The sister spoke about her hard work taking care of her dead sister's children and her feeling of responsibility, while giving up her own education and a future of her own. She had little respect for the widower and there was bitterness and resentment in her monologue. The husband, on the other hand, regretted that he had had to work and was not able to come in time. He expressed a deep sense of grief and feeling of guilt. When the turn came to the junior nurse, new issues were introduced by her, such as of nurses not daring to oppose the matron's decision. In an inner dialogue, she presented the dilemma between loyalty to the senior nurse and indignation and repulsion at her rigidity. Last was the monologue of the doctor and owner of the clinic, performed by Kawanuka, supported by Wright. The doctor expressed his worry about the reputation of the clinic after the incident, and his concern about the press and about the future of the clinic after the tragic event. He defended the policy of charging the patients money and revealed that, before this was implemented, too many patients would come, and that it was not professionally sustainable.

After the four characters' monologues had been presented there was a moment to de-role and for the pairs to dissolve. In resonance with deep democracy and non-hierarchical storytelling it was of no interest during the workshop to interpret or speculate about the group's creations. It was up to each participant how they related to their own curiosities about their pre-conceived understandings and expectations. This agrees with performance as research and theatre-led inquiry that regard the tolerance of ambivalence and complex thinking as an aim and epistemological

pre-requisite as “a recognition of the generative potential of the ambiguity and indeterminacy of the aesthetic object and the necessity for ongoing decoding, analysis and translation” (E. Barrett, in Bolt, 2016, p. 132). The role of the unconscious as a motor for knowledge creation is acknowledged in this kind of performative paradigm – meaning that it is acceptable and anticipated that stories may contradict each other. Just as in Brecht’s poem about the street accident, the point-of-view of each storyteller came to the foreground, underpinning that we are all storytellers and witnesses. The sharing of the four monologues made the real-life origin of the hospital scene pertinent once more, particularly with the last monologue by the doctor and owner of the clinic. Kawanuka’s direct knowledge and relationship to the story contributed to a new contextual understanding: the doctor’s concern for the consequences for his clinic and its survival. In this way, the bridge between the fictional and the real, the imaginative and the factual, was emphasized one last time.

To close the workshop, the chairs were turned back, and the group met in a sitting circle for a last opportunity to share responses to and reflections about the workshop investigation. After an invitation to say whatever was felt to be relevant, there was silence for a while. First voiced was indignation towards the social injustice and oppression represented in the story. This triggered a shared group feeling of empathy with the pregnant woman, as the victim, but then other perspectives emerged, such as:

*They were all right in their own way.*

*None of them were evil.*

*It must have been difficult for the husband.*

*This could have happened in my country too.*

From this point onwards, a new conversation surfaced where the participants started to share stories and thoughts about difficult topics from their own social contexts, for example human and animal rights issues which are difficult to address because of politics, the climate crisis in South America, issues around views on women’s rights and free abortion in Ireland. There was a felt group acknowledgement of how antagonistic conflicts may cause individual and collective trauma. During this last part of the workshop, the image of the dying woman

with her unborn child re-appeared as the communal reference point for the group. In solidarity, it seemed, the focus expanded to other difficult conditions for women worldwide. The dialogue was charged with empathy but what was said also grew out of indignation and anger. Still, the workshop investigation seemed to have raised an awareness of innate structures of feelings that tend to understand and think in exclusive binaries and antagonistic opposites, and this enabled the group, at the end of the workshop, to reflect together with a non-judgemental and a searching attitude.

In my view, the workshop, even if it only lasted 90 minutes, caused a shift in the group that resonates with Barrett's notion of "movement in thought, word and deed" – a notion she refers to as the aim of performance as research (Barrett & Bolt, 2007, p. 130). In the last group reflection, the hospital scene seemed to transgress what its meaning had been until then, and it became a symbol of circumstantial injustice worldwide, including in other times than ours. Through this shift of meaning, our empathy for the pregnant woman, and the emotional charge, returned, but now understood with a different and critical lens, seeing her as a representative of the many victims of social injustice and of undemocratic power relations. This seemed significant because it somehow gave the meaninglessness of the hospital scene a new meaning – namely that *we as a group* had chosen to explore *this specific* story this Sunday morning, and without our workshop investigation the story would have remained silenced. With this shared group recognition, the workshop ended leaving us with a deep humility regarding the circumstantial context of the story.

## Moving on

After the workshop and the *Play, Perform, Learn, Grow* conference, I was left with a sense that the theatre-led inquiry during the workshop had resulted in quite a complex unravelling of perspectives and voices from the hospital scene. As a proposal to building democracy through theatre, the workshop explorations had supported both mainstream and marginalized voices of the group to surface and interact. By encouraging the

expected as well as the surprising responses to the a-symmetrical and antagonistic encounter between the woman and the nurse, the group's awareness of diversity, rank and privilege seemed to grow and develop step by step during the phases of the workshop. There was a decisive shift after the acknowledgement of the burial that put an extra emphasis on the coming together of the fictional and factual levels of the investigation. This could be interpreted as group wisdom emerging in resonance with the notion of deep democracy as claimed by Amy Mindell (2008, p. 213). Still, it is important to recognize the limitations of such a brief workshop exploration when it comes to changing the context and the circumstances of the people who live their lives in the community where the event that formed the kernel of our workshop took place. Some months after the conference in Thessaloniki, I received an email from Kawanuka in which he wrote:

Before we started the workshop, I was normal and okay, but when it got started, I became emotional. All my mind came back home, showing me a picture of that pregnant young lady. Though I didn't know her much, but I used to see her in our community. (Kawanuka, 2019)

He continues to express frustration for not having been able to do anything "to bring justice" and "remind us in our community to prevent such incidents to happen again" (Kawanuka, 2019). In another scenario, I imagine that it would be interesting to bring the workshop to the community where it all happened and, also, to have the opportunity to offer it to the college of nursing education, and other similar institutions, in Uganda. Still, knowing that the conference workshop did not cause or intend to cause any change of policy, I would argue that it served a purpose in holding up a critical lens at practices that lead to such tragic outcomes as represented in the scene. One of the other workshop participants, Hanne Tjersland, a Norwegian dancer and peace worker, has reflected on this, pointing out the value of theatre for deepening our understanding of conflict and therefore also of peace work. She wrote in an email some months after the workshop:

I found that the session ... left me with a little bit deeper understanding of the messy and beautiful condition of being human, and as a peace worker I believe that is one of the greatest understandings I can have. (Tjersland, 2019)

## Conclusion

The outcome of the workshop was an experientially founded recognition and awareness of how binary and habitual thinking patterns in us-them, good-evil could be challenged and loosened by complex thinking and affective understanding inspired by the theoretical framework that integrated inspiration from Brechtian thinking and the Mindells' concept of deep democracy. The new knowledge generated was only possible through the performative research approach that engaged the group in a shared theatre-led inquiry permitting transformative moments. It was essential for the outcome that the group was able to meet and connect on an intersubjective level that respected the individual circumstances of everyone involved. The theoretical frame proved to be useful because it raised an awareness of a broader spectrum of phenomenological ways of knowing, through sensation, intuition and feeling, on an equal term with the more intellectual standpoint as advocated by Brecht. The result was a creative conversation that unravelled a range of experiential perspectives and allowed mainstream and marginalized voices to be articulated and interact. Throughout the workshop, there was an embodied group trust that supported the facilitation and contributed to the group's ability to keep a fluid and generous mindset while exploring the story. Together, we exposed and investigated voices that would otherwise have remained unheard and silenced. I understand my moment of unbalance during the bridge-out as an invitation not only *to* the group, but also *from* the group to deepen our communal awareness of the layered complexity of the story together. In this way the workshop contributed to stimulating new reflexive awareness of personal and cultural bias or, in Bolt's wording, to being moved *by* the experience of the arts practice as a collaborative and relational performative event in the here and now (Bolt, 2016, p. 130).

In this chapter, I have demonstrated how the theatre-led inquiry reached its double objective. On the one hand, the workshop unpacked not-yet imaged stories generated from the antagonistic situation in the hospital scene by inviting the participants' sensory, intuitive, emotional and critical responses to a creative conversation where these perspectives could co-exist. On the other hand, the workshop offered a model for applying theatre as performative research inquiry and experiential learning.



The methods discussed in this chapter will hopefully be of interest to theatre practitioners and performance activists who are in search of inspiration about how to facilitate creative conversations that enable complex and embodied ways of reflecting, and who are interested in the challenge of building and deepening democracy through theatre.

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