

**THEATRE FOR AUDIENCES LABELLED AS HAVING PROFOUND,
MULTIPLE AND COMPLEX LEARNING DISABILITIES:
ASSESSING AND ADDRESSING ACCESS TO PERFORMANCE.**

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Abstract

The research described in this thesis is the result of a collaborative project between The University of Nottingham and Roundabout Education at Nottingham Playhouse, funded through an AHRC Collaborative Doctoral Award, which aimed to explore and begin to overcome the barriers to access to theatre for audiences labelled as having profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD). Positioned primarily from the perspective of the unique worlds of five profoundly disabled young people, the thesis begins with an assessment of their access to theatre in the light of disability discrimination legislation – particularly Article 31 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1991 – and highlights their disenfranchisement from past and current consultation processes, which perpetuates the lack of theatre appropriate to their needs. An initial examination of current audience reception theory - and current theatrical practice for PMLD audiences – suggests that this ‘invisibility’ is caused by a complex range of historico-cultural factors.

The thesis describes the two practical research phases which I undertook as a key part of this collaborative project in order to address this shortfall. In the first phase, *Thumbs Up*, a team of specialists from a range of art forms worked alongside young people at a Nottingham School to experiment with the engagement potential

of three theatre spectra (silence-sound, darkness-light and stillness-action) to foreground emotional narrative moments. This led to the second phase, *White Peacock*, in which I created a play using the three spectra to construct emotional narrative and utilised the concepts of inner and outer frames to ensure that those narratives could be experienced by PMLD audiences within a safe ethical framework that kept the distinction between reality and performance distinct at all times.

The thesis concludes with a number of foundational principles emerging from the research that will assist theatre-makers wishing to create narrative theatre for PMLD audiences in the future.

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immediate family. Without the love and support of my Mum,
husband Richard and son Tom, I'd never have got through it.

DEDICATION

For Karam 1995-2011

This thesis is dedicated to Karam, one of my case study students, who was very brave, returning to see the second performance of *White Peacock* despite his fears. He overcame them and proudly celebrated, along with his peers, the achievement of being part of a theatre audience.

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Introduction.

The thesis begins with a short piece of fictional writing. It is a dialogue between Jasmine, a fifteen-year old young woman labelled as having Profound, Multiple and Complex Learning Disabilities (PMLD), and Lesley, her companion. It is set in a school for students with special educational needs. Today a theatre company is performing in the school hall, and the teacher thinks it best if Jasmine and Lesley remain in the classroom.

Lesley:

Jasmine, we'll stay here, love. It's a nice day. We'll go over by the window. Come on.

Jasmine hears the sound of her peers leaving the classroom.

She moves from foot to foot, vocalising with increasing intensity.

Lesley:

They're off to see a play in the hall. We'll stay here.

Jasmine:

I'll take myself over to the window. *(She moves to the window)* The sun warms my hands when I touch the glass. *(She touches the glass.*

She moves to a chair)

My nails make a scratchy feeling on the back of the chair. *(Lesley goes to the cupboard.)* She's getting my box out. Good. I'm going to bury my hands in the stuff inside the box. *(She buries her hands)* I'm

doing play. What is a play and why can't I go?

Jasmine is a fictitious construct, created for the purpose of narrating this study and its results, based on real young people with whom I have had direct experience of working over the past thirty years. She is described as having a range of sensory impairments, arrested intellectual development, along with a number of physical conditions. A combination of these factors means that she sometimes uses a wheelchair and has a unique, pre-verbal way of communicating which I have translated in the passage above. Some art forms are available to Jasmine, both as an audience member and participant: she loves listening to, and dancing to, music (heavy rock in particular), she is a lively performer within school assemblies alongside her friends, and interacts with IT software to create digital art. Jasmine has a companion, called Lesley, who works alongside her, supporting her needs and advocating on her behalf when required. Lesley is also a fictional construct based on people I have met and worked alongside. Jasmine and Lesley's voices will begin each chapter.

The aim of this study is to assess and address Jasmine's access to theatre, specifically her emotional engagement in a dramatic narrative, as a member of an audience. My motivation to carry out this study, which is funded by a Collaborative Doctoral Award from the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), is threefold: to research the theoretical reasons for the lack of theatre for such

audiences, to create a new play from that exploration, and to analyse the play in order to extract some general principles for future provision. The collaborative nature of the study, working with the School of English at The University of Nottingham and Roundabout Education at Nottingham Playhouse, enabled me to address these multi-faceted objectives. In this introductory chapter, I provide the context for my research, beginning with the complexities of defining a PMLD audience. I then introduce the reader to my five case study students whose specific needs and unique qualities inform the remainder of the thesis. These young people provide the context for an examination of the legislative and financial inadequacies contributing to the shortfall in theatre provision. The introduction then outlines the chapters that follow, before finishing with a description of the challenge of using the written word, as necessitated by this thesis, as a means by which to explore Jasmine's experience as a member of an audience.

What is a PMLD Audience?

The act of defining a PMLD audience sits uncomfortably with the notions of inclusivity that are central to this thesis and to my wider practice as teacher and theatre-maker. Although this discomfort is problematic, I believe the act of definition is necessary in order to consider the specificity of theatre-making for such audiences, and to contextualise it. I am conscious that in the process of defining, I

inadvertently reinforce marginalisation and strengthen concepts of otherness for people who may already experience disenfranchisement in many areas of their lives. I am aware that the students involved in this research have not given me permission to describe, or define them, as PMLD people. However, I recognise that 'labels are sometimes viewed as the keys to unlock entitlement'.¹ Indeed the use of the PMLD label provided me with funding to carry out this research and will be needed, I surmise, to enable targeted dissemination of my findings at the conclusion of the process. Therefore I define PMLD through the words of Graham Welch, Adam Ockelford and Sally Zimmermann:

Pupils with PMLD have profound global developmental delay, such that cognitive, sensory, physical, emotional and social development are in the very early stages (as in the first 12 months of usual development).²

Currently within England, there is a population of approximately 9,000 such young people of compulsory school age. This group is part of a larger population (approximately 38,000) who are labelled as being severely learning disabled (SLD). Three-quarters of the SLD population attend special schools and such settings account for approximately 0.5 per cent of the school population in England.³ It is

¹ Adam Ockelford, *Music for Children and Young People with Complex Needs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 1.

² Graham Welch, Adam Ockelford and Sally Zimmermann, *Provision of Music in Special Education* (London: Institute of Education And Royal National Institute of the Blind, 2001), p. 17.

³ Salt Review, *Independent Review of Teacher Supply for Pupils with Severe, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties. (SLD and PMLD)*, 2010
<http://www.education.gov.uk/publicationDetail/Page1>[accessed February 2012]

generally recognised that there has been an increase in the number of PMLD people over the last 25 years although its extent is unclear as a result of uncoordinated data.⁴ This increase is largely due to the improved survival rate of early gestation and low birth weight babies along with advancement of medical interventions reducing mortality rates of PMLD people as they mature.⁵

Although I am identifying medical reasons for the increase in PMLD people, it is important to make clear that my working definition of PMLD in this thesis belongs to the *social* model of disability, rather than the *medical*, or deficit, model. Dan Goodley and Katherine Runswick-Cole define the former by stating:

[The social model of disability] views disability as the product of specific social, cultural and economic structures, and aims to address the oppression of and prejudice against institutional, cultural and psychological forms of exclusion.⁶

This social model challenges both the labelling of impairment groups and the segregationist practices belonging to a medical, or individual model, which pathologises disability and categorises people within structures for the purpose of managing and treating those pathologies. Extrapolating from the social model for the purposes of

⁴ Bob Hudson, 'Incomplete data on people with learning disabilities', *Community Care*. Article: Description of a report, commissioned by Mencap and the Learning Disability Coalition, on the numbers, life experiences and services used by people with learning disabilities. <http://www.communitycare.co.uk/Articles/2008/07/10/108783/research-knowledge-gaps-on-people-with-learning-disabilities-in-england.html> [accessed June 2012]

⁵ Hudson, p. 8

⁶ Katherine Runswick-Cole and Dan Goodley, '*Better than a spit-fire ride!*' - an evaluation of *Something in the Air?* Oily Cart's special school production for The Manchester International Festival (Manchester Metropolitan University, 2009), p. 18.

this research, I begin from the stance that it is *theatre* as it currently functions (as a cultural structure) which disables people and denies access, not their impairments.

Such a social model, of course, conflicts with my reluctant use of the label PMLD. Goodley articulates the problem well:

People with learning difficulties draw on what may be understood as a social model to challenge the exclusionary practices which place people in a variety of impairment groups. The rejection of labelling can also be understood in this context: the categorisation of people into impairment subgroups is inevitably divisive.⁷

But there is a pragmatic reason why this label is justifiable in the context of this study. It is clear from my experience over two decades of touring theatre to special needs settings that there is often a group of children and young people, frequently labelled as PMLD, for whom it is assumed the performance will not be appropriate. This assumption is often linked to 'inappropriate' theatre having been experienced by those young people in the past. For example, the pieces may have been age-inappropriate (created for chronologically younger children), or over-stimulating for audience members with sensory impairments. This is why Jasmine remains in the classroom with Lesley at the beginning of this chapter. It is at that specific population that this study is targeted. However, I request that the

⁷ Dan Goodley, 'Making Connections: the relevance of the social model of disability for people with learning difficulties', *British Journal of Learning Disabilities*, 29, 2 (2002), 45-50 (p. 49).

reader assumes three words in addition to the acronym. The additional words are: people 'labelled as being' PMLD. This makes clear that Jasmine is defined by a label which she did not choose for herself.

Along with being sub-categorised within the learning disability population, people labelled as being PMLD have been *additionally* labelled as being 'hardest to reach'. In this thesis, I argue that we need to shift responsibility for the perceived difficulties of communication away from the audience, and place the requirement for finding a more accessible form of theatre solidly with the theatre-maker: the responsibility of meeting this challenge lies with them.

Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose.

Having offered a generalised definition of a PMLD audience, I now introduce the reader to the five specific young people who formed my case-study group, in order to offer some insight into their individual and varied worlds as the context for the theoretical discourse that follows. I observed the behaviours recorded below over the period of a year during visits to their school, with some additional information contributed by the companions who work alongside the students. It is important to note that, while these introductions are based on my observations, the voices of the young people are written in the first person as a means of retaining their centrality to this study, and of

highlighting their individuality.⁸ These five young people attend Oak Field School and Sports College in the City of Nottingham. They are all aged between 14 and 16 years of age and therefore within Key Stage 4 of their compulsory education.

Ash

I like to move independently around my environment and find sitting in one place a challenge. I don't use a wheelchair or any mobility device. I like to keep myself to myself so I'm reluctant to make eye contact with people, even those I know well, preferring to peep at them from a sideways angle. My companion knows that peeping sideways is my preferred way of engaging with something that interests me. Sometimes at school, my curiosity gets the better of me, prompting me to approach people whilst making quiet throaty grunts which are my 'I get it' or 'I'm interested' noises.⁹ My preferred arrangement for learning and concentration is to have a companion sitting to the side of me as this helps me feel secure. I sometimes need some 'time out' during intensive work, taking myself into the 'cave' area of the classroom. The 'cave' is a space we use when we need time to process stimuli, calm down or let off steam. Being in this alternative space means that the classroom stays 'untainted' with negative behaviour and we are encouraged to take such behaviour away from our usual learning environment. I vocalise loudly on some

⁸ In order to comply with the ethical protocols of The University of Nottingham, pseudonyms have been used for the students in the study.

⁹ 'I get it' became the project shorthand for moments when the students seemed to particularly engage with a stimulus.

occasions and I can make my preferences clear through pushing stimuli away if I'm not interested.

Bud

I approach most things with a sense of curiosity, taking things in and sometimes showing gentle amusement. I enjoy adding sounds of my own when focusing on tasks or listening to stories. I sometimes have bursts of unpredictable and enthusiastic energy, often resulting in my exploring the surrounding environment independently. If I am anxious about new situations or people, I stay very close to my companion, sometimes taking their hand or trying to sit on her or his lap. This sometimes settles me enough to be brave and stay in the room. I sometimes like to stand apart from the people in my group and observe activities at a distance.

Lily

I have a very clear system for physically communicating with my companions which involves reaching out and grabbing with my fingers in order to attract attention or comment on something that is happening around me. I look around very actively when placed in visually stimulating environments, focusing especially well on light sources. I sometimes react with a real willingness to communicate through smiles, lip-smacking and vocalising with 'ba ba' sounds. If a stimulus is taken away that I am particularly enjoying, such as a switch to control a sound effect, I react with a subtle but specific quizzical sound. This very particular sound means 'no'. My preferred

means of exploring new objects is via my mouth, enthusiastically interacting with them via taste and texture. I need plenty of time to process changes of stimuli or mood, often reacting with great verve up to twenty seconds after the event. This is especially relevant when people negotiate with me about moving my motorised wheelchair, which I cannot use independently, as my response often takes a while to register.

Poppy

I am happy when there is order and routine in my world. When this is the case I am placid, make eye contact with the people around me and make gentle grunting sounds. These sounds are my way of communicating with myself. I am very independent within school, enjoying walking around, sitting and standing still or rocking from foot to foot. If I feel that disorder has been brought to my world, I am much more energised in the way I occupy space and vocalise. I can sometimes pace around until equilibrium has been restored. I am very good at making my feelings clear. Generally speaking, the more calm I appear, the more engaged I am with whatever is going on around me. I will take myself away from a task, stimulus or situation if I don't want to take part.

Rose

I am asleep during a large proportion of the day because my active hours take place during the night when I am at home. As a result of this, I choose to take part in school activities from a seated position

or lying on the floor. This makes it easier to drift in and out of sleep. At times, I move around the school in a wheelchair pushed by my teacher or companion. I need lots of time to move from a low vantage point to a seated or standing position and I need plenty of encouragement. I have subtle signs of being engaged and so have to rely on companions to interpret these signs to people when they meet me for the first time. If people want to get my attention, I like them to be in close physical proximity and to rub my back. I use a low grunting noise to communicate 'I get it' moments. I really like texture because I am visually impaired and I enjoy tapping objects with my fingers, accompanying these types of activities with gentle cooing sounds.

In terms of having access to the experience of being an audience, these five young people visit concerts, films, and theatre as part of both curricular and extra-curricular provision. This is made possible by an extremely proactive headteacher and staff team who create opportunities to take part in such events, but this cultural access is not replicated for students in schools everywhere. The logistical challenges of travelling to venues and the cognitive inaccessibility of much of the work on offer is challenging for many schools, care-settings and families. This lack of opportunity to be an audience may also be linked to the practical challenges of choice-making for the PMLD population. If the teacher, companion or family

of a PMLD person does not deem it important to attend arts events, then it is a choice that will never be offered.

Bob Hudson alludes to the challenge facing PMLD people with regard to independent living and writes that even the most fundamental of life choices may be difficult to achieve:

Most people, no matter what their level of disability, are living at home, usually with parents, but those with more severe disabilities are more likely to be living in residential care homes and NHS accommodation - not far short of one-fifth of the total. About one in 10 of people are in supported accommodation, but most appear to have no choice over who they live with or where they live.¹⁰

Ash, Bud, Lily, Rose and Poppy rely on a network of companions and advocates which, in theory, empowers them to choose how they live their lives. But as Hudson suggests, the life choices for most PMLD people are likely to be, at best, limited, or, at worst, not there at all. This has implications for the demographic of a PMLD audience. In reality, such an audience consists not only of PMLD people but also their companions whose decision it is likely to have been to attend a performance – or not - in the first place. This dyadic relationship plays a key role in facilitating access to theatre for PMLD audiences and will be explored in greater detail in later chapters.

¹⁰ Hudson, p. 1.

As this thesis unfolds, the reader will become familiar with Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose who formed my case-study group. Jasmine's fictitious voice introduces the chapters in the form of monologues or dialogues written from her point of view. Her voice is unheard by those around her and is an attempt, on my part, to bring Jasmine – as a representative of the wider PMLD audience - into this research journey. She has, of course, her own internal communication with herself, which is unique to her and to which I will never have access, so I have used my own patterns of speech to put her words onto the page. Throughout the remainder of the thesis, I sometimes refer to my five case-study students by name within chapters, to represent all PMLD audience members. Sometimes, however, I use the phrase 'PMLD audiences'. I decided to use a range of names and phrases in this way to avoid unnecessary and inappropriate generalisation whilst writing about audience members whose needs are varied and individualised.

The Legislation

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in the UK in 1991, sets out what every child (under 18 years of age) needs for a safe, happy and fulfilled childhood, and is the most widely adopted international human rights treaty in history.¹¹ The Convention declares that '[the rights] apply equally to every child

¹¹ United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. (1989). <http://www.unicef.org/rightsite> [accessed June 2012] (no pagination available)

regardless of who they are, or where they are from'. Article 31 (Part 1) of the convention states that:

Every child has the right to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child and to participate freely in cultural life and the arts.¹²

The focus of my research is the component of the Article which asserts Jasmine's right to participate in cultural life and thus, in this context, to be a member of a theatre audience. She and her peers are seldom seen at public performances and specialist theatre, appropriate to their needs, is rarely created. This is arguably a denial of their 'cultural right'.¹³ Part 1 of Article 31, whilst clear in its message, contains two phrases requiring careful consideration in Jasmine's case. Firstly, the term 'appropriate to the age' is relevant only within the context of neuro-typical development. Cognitively speaking, Jasmine's functionality is at odds with her chronological age, meaning she may not understand theatre narratives, nor their telling, in a way deemed appropriate for a fifteen year old. Additionally, she is in the midst of adolescence, so narratives that are suitable for Jasmine's cognitive age may be patronising in form and content, robbing her of dignified participation despite the Article being founded on 'respect for the dignity and worth of each individual'.¹⁴ Further examination is also needed of the second

¹² United Nations, Article 31, Part 1 (no pagination available)

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *ibid.*

phrase: 'to participate freely'. This suggests a number of freedoms: the freedom to choose whether or not to attend a theatre event, free access to the building and its facilities, freedom to leave the performing space in which the theatre is taking place at her will, and access to the content of the theatre piece, are all challenging for Jasmine. The complexity of these accesses is compounded by the need for either her family or Lesley, her companion, to enable Jasmine's participative freedom. Her participation is 'free' only if her advocates can facilitate that being the case. This multitude of freedoms will be explored in full throughout this thesis.

Part 2 of Article 31 also needs close examination. It states that:

Parties shall respect and promote the right of the child to participate fully in cultural and artistic life and shall encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity.¹⁵

Attendance at theatre events, as with all art forms, is polyfunctional for the consumer, enabling access to a cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity simultaneously. Part 2 states that the responsibility for providing such activities lies with government, as the ratifying party, and that in order to safeguard appropriate and equal opportunity, someone, somewhere, needs to assess what is culturally appropriate for Jasmine. They then need to find a way of engaging her with it. In addition, the statement requires that the

¹⁵ United Nations, Article 31, Part 2 (no pagination available)

opportunity to do so should be on a par with other young people. My experience of working in this field is that this engagement is rarely, if ever, considered.

Within the UK, the remit for ensuring that Jasmine is included in Article 31 lies largely with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. As she is a resident of England – as are all my five case-study students - this responsibility is devolved to the Arts Council of England (ACE) which receives public funding to enable arts activities, including theatre performance, to reach her. In addition to the implementation of the Convention, ACE has 'general and specific duties' under the Disability Equality Act 2010 to create arts experiences 'for as many people as possible across the country'.¹⁶ In its Disability Equality Scheme (DES) 2010-13, it aims to 'ensure that the Arts are inclusive of, and accessible to, disabled people'.¹⁷ Although neither art form nor young person specific, the scheme's remit includes theatre provision, and therefore, according to their drive for inclusivity, should include theatre that is accessible to Jasmine.

A central tenet of the DES is that disabled people should be involved in the discussion of arts provision, its barriers, and its improvement. The scheme states:

¹⁶ Arts Council England, *Disability Equality Scheme 2010-13* http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/publication_archive/disability-equality-scheme [accessed June 2012] (p. 4.)

¹⁷ Arts Council England, p. 4.

Arts Council England's approach is to continue to involve disabled people in our work to highlight the barriers experienced by a diverse range of disabled people, and for disabled people to assist us in identifying how to effectively remove those barriers.¹⁸

This consultation process, carried out via Taking Part, a continuous national survey, is laudable, but it is predicated on a degree of cultural understanding, and cognitive capacity, being in place as a basis for consultation.¹⁹ If Jasmine does not know what theatre *is*, she has no context for the questions being asked. It also assumes that whoever answers on Jasmine's behalf believes that the questions are of relevance and merit a response. The majority of parents of young PMLD people will not have experienced theatre alongside their children and there may be an assumption that 'it's not for Jasmine', for reasons which I go on to discuss fully in this thesis. It is unlikely that ACE has addressed this question: how can we ask Jasmine to tell us about what she would like when she may have no concept of theatre? This is undeniably a challenging notion, but should not be a reason to exclude her from a consultation process which could enable specialist provision for her, and her peers, to be funded and developed. It is likely that any findings from the consultation process distributed by ACE will not have taken into account Jasmine's views,

¹⁸ Arts Council England, p. 7.

¹⁹ Department for Culture, Media and Sport, *Taking Part Survey* (2005), http://www.culture.gov.uk/what_we_do/research_and_statistics/7390.aspx [accessed June 2012] (no pagination available)

nor those of the PMLD adult population. Her lack of visibility in the data suggests that she sits outside the 'as many people as possible' sample and her exclusion from the consultation process is a situation that Jasmine did not choose for herself. Thus a feature of this project was to enable Jasmine to become more visible through a process of awareness-raising.

Raising Awareness Beyond the Performance Space

The range of constituencies involved in this process of awareness-raising radiated out from the core case-study group. This core group experienced the live performances of *White Peacock*, the piece I created for them and which is described in Chapters Four, Five and Six. However, numerous other individuals, groups of people, and organisations were involved in the awareness-raising process. The further they were from the core - and thus the live experience of the play - the greater their engagement became reliant on lecture and anecdote. Figure 1 summarises the constituencies involved in awareness-raising beyond the performance space.

This notion of dissemination was instrumental in attracting funding, and facilitated the collaborative relationship between the University and The Playhouse. Key to this was the empowerment of non-disabled audience members, along with other interested parties, to advocate for the concepts and principles driving the creation of *White Peacock*.

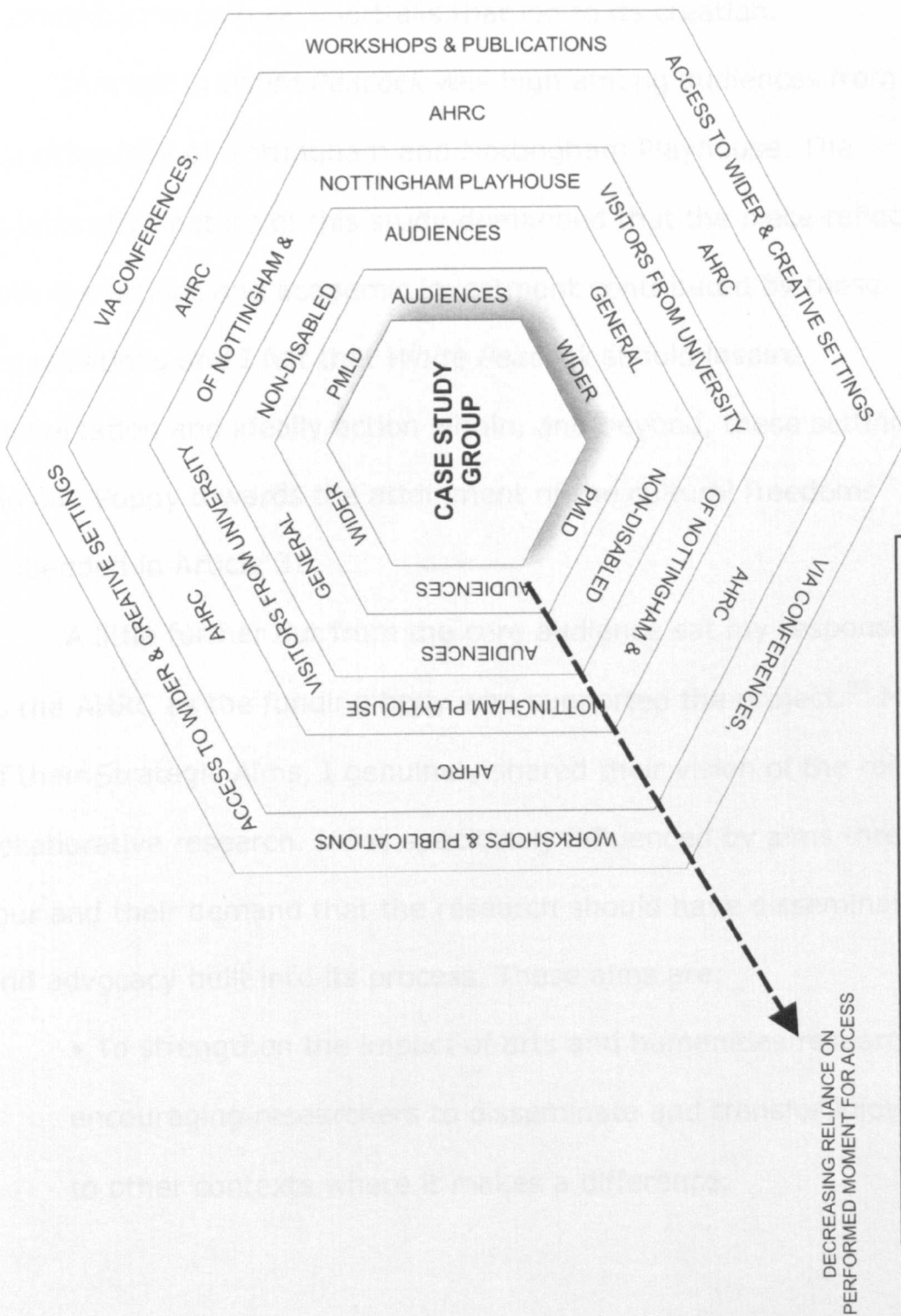


Figure 1
Raising awareness beyond the performance space

I am not referring here to the theatrical content, but rather to addressing the cultural shortfalls that led to its creation.

Interest in *White Peacock* was high among audiences from both the University of Nottingham and Nottingham Playhouse. The collaborative nature of this study demanded that the piece reflected both the artistic and academic investment contributed by these organisations and I felt that *White Peacock* should inspire conversation and ideally action within, and beyond, these settings, moving Poppy towards the attainment of the cultural freedoms embedded in Article 31.

A little further out from the core audience sat my responsibility to the AHRC as the funding body who supported the project.²⁰ Mindful of their Strategic Aims, I genuinely shared their vision of the role of collaborative research. I was specifically influenced by aims three and four and their demand that the research should have dissemination and advocacy built into its process. These aims are:

- To strengthen the impact of arts and humanities research by encouraging researchers to disseminate and transfer knowledge to other contexts where it makes a difference.

²⁰ Arts and Humanities Research Council

- To raise the profile of arts and humanities research and to be an effective advocate for its social, cultural and economic significance.²¹

I was, however, mindful of the phrase 'makes a difference', which somehow carries a suggestion of cultural hegemony. In her examination of applied theatre, Helen Nicholson provides useful warning about the desire for the theatre artist to be a catalyst for change, and Jonathan Neelands reflects on her stance by stating that she:

rightly suggests the need for a rigorous critical reflexivity in order to ensure that in claiming to be making radical social interventions into the lives of 'vulnerable' others we are not merely accommodating the displaced politics of the social market paradigm of governance.²²

The capacity of non-PMLD audiences to remain reflexive was therefore important if they were to be empowered as change-agents. I wanted to be sure that any vicarious 'magic pleasure', a term used by Shifra Schonmann to describe adults observing children at the theatre (and a feeling potentially experienced by our non-PMLD audiences too), did not distract from the fact that there are systemic societal shortfalls motivating the *need* to create the play.²³ The 'difference' as outlined in the AHRC Strategic Aims, needed to be

²¹ <http://www.ahrc.ac.uk/About/Pages/default.aspx>. Accessed 13/6/11

²² Jonathan Neelands, 'Taming the political; the struggle over recognition in the politics of applied theatre', *Research in Drama Education*, 12, (2007), 3, 305-317 (p. 315).

²³ Shifra Schonmann, *Theatre as a Medium for Children and Young People: images and observations* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), p. 52.

addressed within the systems that *created* marginalisation, not within marginalised PMLD audiences themselves. Specifically, I would be disseminating information and emergent findings about the research with which I was engaged through conferences and workshops within both theatre and academic settings. This would enable me to begin the task of making Jasmine visible to a range of constituencies and a list of these events can be found in Appendix 1.

This thesis examines the complex socio-political and cultural reasons why Jasmine's access to theatre is so limited, as exemplified by the barriers to Article 31 as outlined above, and I begin to address the shortfall through the development of a model of theatre which can engage Jasmine and her peers.

The Chapters

In Chapter One I consider the cultural barriers to access through an examination of audience reception theory and attempt to position Ash and his peers within current theoretical discourse. Beginning with the work of Susan Bennett and Baz Kershaw, I then trace the emerging visibility of otherness in performance through the work of Graeae Theatre Company. I consider the continuing 'invisibility' of PMLD audiences, despite Graeae's pioneering practice, and consider the reasons why this is the case. My discussion centres on Bennett's notion of outer and inner frames, as they relate to Ash's limited access to the culturality of theatre spaces, the social behaviour

expected within them and the plays they contain. Considering the specificity of the triadic relationship between Ash, his companion and the performer, I draw on Hans Robert Jauss's 'horizon of expectations' as a useful term which will inform my thinking as the thesis progresses.²⁴

Chapter Two examines the way in which two specialist theatre companies, Bamboozle and Oily Cart, create flexible, multi-sensory pieces for PMLD audiences. I argue that, despite the work of these companies, there remains a shortfall in provision, and a failure of such theatre to fulfill the aims of Article 31, for two reasons. The first is the positioning of the companies outside regular and statutory funding streams; the second is the lack of emotional narratives at the core of their work. Having identified these shortcomings, I suggest that it might be possible to signpost, and thus foreground, narrative moments of emotional intensity for PMLD audiences using the three theatre spectra: silence-sound, darkness-light and stillness-action, as a sub-set within a multi-sensory approach. I thus examine each of these spectra in detail, positioning them as key constructs to facilitate emotional engagement and develop a model of theatre practice which moves beyond that of the two companies examined here.

Chapter Three describes *Thumbs Up*, the first part of the practical research phase, which begins to address the shortfalls outlined in Chapters One and Two and tests the potential of the three

²⁴ Hans Robert Jauss and Elizabeth Benzinger, 'Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory', *New Literary History*, 2 (1970), 1, 7-37 (p. 120).

spectra model. Positioning the study as a small scale, emancipatory, participatory action research project, I draw on the work of specialist academics in the field of learning disability. Through my collaboration with Nottingham Playhouse, an ACE funded regional producing house, I address the question: how can various art forms and their combinations be used to foreground moments of emotional narrative for Lily and her peers?²⁵ The chapter describes how, in collaboration with a team of art form specialists, we created two pilot theatre pieces: *Tree* and *Harry*, which were performed in a school to learning disabled audiences.

Having tested the potential of using the three spectra to foreground moments of emotional narrative to create engagement in the *Thumbs Up* phase of the research, the second part of my practical research is the subject of Chapters Four, Five and Six which focus on the production of the play, *White Peacock*. In Chapter Four, I begin to address the question: how is Bennett's concept of outer and inner frames useful in ensuring this engagement remains ethically safe and supportive of the aims of Article 31? Informed by *Harry* and *Tree*, I outline my collaboration with Oak Field School and Nottingham Playhouse to create *White Peacock*, a piece that is appropriate not only for PMLD audiences but also for diverse communities. In order to position *White Peacock* within current discourse, I consider three models of play-making through the work of Berthold Brecht, Alison

²⁵ Producing houses are theatres which create their own productions, in contrast to receiving houses which host productions created elsewhere.

Oddey and Stuart Spencer. The chapter contains the full script of the play.

Chapter Five describes the means by which I collected data alongside Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose, during two performances of the play. It chronicles the engagement behaviours of my case-study students during four key emotional moments within the narrative and describes the process by which I prepared the companions to record levels of engagement. This is followed by general and specific observations of the five case-study students by the companions and myself, ending with some thoughts about ensuring an ethically safe passage through the piece in the context of Article 31.

Chapter Six contains an analysis of the play carried out in the light of the case-study observations and emerging insights. I consider to what extent the three spectra strategies explored in *Harry and Tree*, along with the application of Bennett's concept of outer and inner frames in the production of *White Peacock*, enabled my case-study group to be emotionally and ethically engaged as members of an audience. I return to the theoretical framework explored in Chapters One and Two, simplifying Bennett's inter-related framing constructs for the purposes of analysis. Through a detailed examination, which I position against the work of key theoreticians, I put forward the notion of 'events', 'breathing spaces', and repeated performances as being key enabling structures for PMLD audiences to distinguish between enacted emotions and real emotions. This

enables me to create a series of recommendations for regional producing houses and practitioners, which embed the learning to emerge from this research journey. In the spirit of Article 31, some of the recommendations are written using Jasmine's fictitious voice to carry her needs forward.

The Cultural Model of Disability.

Within this thesis I discuss the medical and social models of disability, positioning my research within the latter. However, there is a third, cultural model that I do not explore here. Goodley locates this paradigm within 'a cultural trope and historical community that raises questions about the materiality of the body and the social formulations that are used to interpret bodily and cognitive differences'.²⁶ This model, which originated in North America in the 1970s, posits that particular ways of thinking about people are perpetuated through customs and institutions that reinforce the belief that disability is abnormal. Although of some relevance to my thesis, the notion at the core of this model, as set out by Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, is that culture regulates 'all human behaviour' and this conceptual complexity rendered it unwieldy within the parameters of my research.²⁷ In contrast, the social model with its 'simple, memorable and effective' recognition of the systemic and

²⁶ *Disability and Social Theory: New Developments and Directions*, ed. by Daniel Goodley, Bill Hughes and Lennard Davis (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), p. 321.

²⁷ Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, *Staring: How we Look* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 25.

material barriers to cultural access, enabled me to consider a replicable framework within which to position the case for change in line with Article 31.²⁸ Despite examples of inspirational performances by PMLD participants, as documented by Melissa Nash, whose research is positioned within the cultural model paradigm, the blurring of the boundary between audience and performer within these pieces makes them non-replicable for ACE funded regional theatres. This is due to their reliance on improvisational, narrative-free approaches within lengthy residencies in care settings; these factors make this approach logistically and economically unviable at the time of writing.²⁹ In contrast, I was interested in exploring a replicable and affordable model.

However, there is one aspect of this study that aligns with the cultural model, and where the framework of that model helps to underpin the importance of the choices made in the practical phases of my research. That is: the focus – which I explore in Chapter Four – on the power of a disabled actor to challenge the pre-conceptions of a non-disabled audience. The presence of a wheelchair-using actor, and the normalisation of his character's disability within the narrative, was designed to disrupt assumptions which the audience may have held about his place within, what James Charlton terms, informal,

²⁸ Tom Shakespeare, 'The Social Model of Disability', in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard Davis (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 219.

²⁹ Melissa C Nash, 'Beyond Therapy: "Performance" work with People who have PMLD in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, ed. by Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 191.

culturally constructed, 'classification systems'.³⁰ These systems can create misconceptions about a disabled person's capacity to be socially and sexually functional. The disruption of this potential misconception was catalysed through the audience being able to *observe* his disability, an act rendered non-voyeuristic through aesthetic distance 'transforming the closed look of a stare into a more open look that is both receptive and creative'.³¹ The audience was given tacit permission to stare.

Clearly, the important role played by culture in the regulation of human behaviour is relevant to addressing access to performance, both to PMLD audiences and theatre practitioners. Thus there is a need for further research in this area, but such research falls outside the scope of this thesis.³²

The Challenge of the Written Word

It is paradoxical to record Poppy's thoughts, feelings and experiences through the written word in a thesis of this nature, as this form of promulgation is anathema to her communication needs and preferences. Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, in the context of working with a disabled actor, describe the performance process as 'a series of sensual experiences, suspensions of personal decorum,

³⁰ James I Charlton, 'The Dimensions of Disability Oppression: An Overview' in *The Disability Studies Reader*, ed. by Lennard Davis (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 220.

³¹ Jim Ferris, 'Aesthetic Distance' in *Bodies in Commotion: Disability and Performance*, ed. by Carrie Sandahl and Philip Auslander (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), p. 75.

³² Petra Kuppers has contributed much to the discussion of the cultural model, however her emphasis on socio-political attitudes to physical disability and body image rather than learning disability, make it of limited relevance here.

Petra Kuppers, *Disability and Contemporary Performance: Bodies on Edge* (London: Routledge, 2003)

patterns of body orientations and chains of altered demeanour. And it is impossible to notate; it resists the document'.³³ There are parallels here with recording the process of working alongside Poppy and her companion. Theoretical discourse translates with relative ease from thought to document, but this study is predicated on *Poppy's* experience of theatre, not mine, nor those of theoreticians who have gone before me. Documenting her experience was extremely challenging and I am aware that the capacity of the written word to communicate the lived experience has limitations. However, I write in the hope that the concomitant resistance, as outlined by Pearson and Shanks, ensures a rigorous and careful progression of discourse and practice in order to transpose what is and was, at times, an instinctive, kinaesthetic experience into an analytical, academic thesis. As both researcher and theatre-maker embarking on new work, I was interested in the live interactive alchemy through which a play is initially created and then performed for (and with) Poppy. John McGrath writes about the process of defining this alchemy:

...each occasion of theatre is different, evanescent and impossible to record...But what it does all too often is to reduce the language of theatre that is studied academically to the most easily obtainable - the words... But words are not the

³³ Mike Pearson and Michael Shanks, *Theatre/Archaeology* (London:Routledge, 2001), p. 20.

'language' of theatre, and by exclusively attending to them we reduce, impoverish the event for academic convenience.³⁴

I believe that it is necessary to extrapolate this quotation and apply it to the complexity of *making* theatre for Poppy, with its very necessary evanescence. So it is with an awareness of the limitations of the written word that I attempt within this thesis to record my creative process, only too aware of the challenge of the task. Pearson writes, in the context of his own praxis, that he finds himself

on the borderlands of professional practice, of technologies, of personal and artistic identity, of conceptual and economic feasibility; on those boundaries where definitions are under constant negotiation.³⁵

There are certainly echoes here with the challenge of marrying academic rigour with the exploration of new feasibilities. Perhaps 'hinterlands' rather than 'borderlands' is the more appropriate term, with its suggestion of underdevelopment or 'being behind'. My belief is that progress in this field is contingent upon applying, as much as possible, a clear dialectic to an instinctive and ineffable creative process. Its complexity is undeniably prone to obfuscation. This study attempts to diversify current thinking and practice in order to make Jasmine and her peers visible, but is understandably limited by the need for the content to be *understood* rather than *felt* by the reader. I hope that by writing about *White Peacock* in this academic context,

³⁴ John McGrath, *A Good Night Out* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 5.

³⁵ Pearson and Shanks, p.15.

the reader can glimpse how it felt both to make it, and experience it,
as a piece of theatre.

Chapter One

An Examination of Audience Reception Theory: looking for PMLD audiences in the current discourse.

The chapter begins in a theatre foyer close to Jasmine's home. Lesley has taken her there to 'see a play'.

Jasmine:

This building smells of coffee and perfume.

I can hear the beep of a till. Is it a shop or maybe it's a cafe?

Lesley:

Come on Jas, we'll squeeze into this lift. Down we go.

Jasmine and Lesley travel in the lift to the lower ground floor. They enter the auditorium and are shown to the wheelchair bay.

Jasmine:

We're in a very big room which sounds full of quietly talking people.

That's quite a nice noise. *Jasmine reaches out.* Lesley's chair feels bouncy and furry. It squeaks when she moves.

The house lights go down.

Why is it going dark slowly? Lesley?

Lesley:

Shh, Jas. It's about to start.

Jasmine:

What is? Where?

The purpose of this chapter is to consider the place of PMLD students, represented above by the fictitious Jasmine, within current audience reception theory. As outlined in my introduction, despite legislation being in place which promotes the rhetoric of inclusion, very few PMLD people attend theatre events. In this chapter I will examine the socio-historical and cultural factors contributing to this with reference to theories of reception, particularly those outlined by Bennett, whose examination of alternative theatre argues for the importance of emancipatory spectatorship to disenfranchised audiences. I examine Kershaw's concept of oppositional practice becoming mainstream in relation to the work of Graeae Theatre Company, arguing that, despite the increased visibility of differently-abled performers, the accepted presence of otherness has not been extended to PMLD audiences. Moving on to consider Ash's place within Bennett's concept of outer and inner frames, I consider his limited access to the culturality of theatre spaces, the social behaviour expected within them and the fictional world of the plays they contain. I examine the complex relationship between frame-makers and cultural consumers, with specific focus on Jauss's 'horizon of expectations' with regard to the role of the companion and the presence of non-disabled audience members. The chapter concludes with a suggestion that PMLD audiences may not be able to access what Richard Schechner terms the 'differently real' without significant support and that, until

theatre-makers address this issue, it will be impossible to attain the aims of Article 31.¹

Empowering the Audience

In *Theatre Audiences*, Bennett looks at the complex relationships between those in control of the *production* of theatre (writers, directors, actors and funders) and the *receivers* of theatre (the audience). Placing these relationships within an historical, political and cultural context, Bennett's major focus is to examine the centrality of the 'emancipation of the spectator' to the work of oppositional theatre practitioners.² This release from passive audience receptivity, as championed by the alternative theatre movement, holds potential resonance for Ash, for whom restrictions abound in many areas of his life. Thus the notion of emancipation as applied to a PMLD audience is central to this research and there are two key concepts outlined by Bennett which I would like to apply to this exploration. These are: the categorisation of theatre into major movements (mainstream, alternative and intercultural); and the 'outer and inner frames' through which theatre is experienced.³

Bennett refers to three main categories of theatre audience and the majority of her examples of practice are positioned within these models. The first is theatre that is produced from within 'dominant

¹ Richard Schechner, *Performance Theory* (New York: Routledge, 2003), p. 190.

² Susan Bennett, *Theatre Audiences: A Theory of Production and Reception*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1997), p. 1.

³ Bennett, p. 139.

cultural practice', representing the position of mainstream theatre-makers and funders.⁴ This work is made possible by government arts funding, takes place in purpose-built spaces and tends to be attended by affluent, middle-class theatre-goers. The second is alternative or oppositional theatre created for, and sometimes with, marginalised groups, often taking place in non-theatre spaces with limited funding resources and speaking to a 'diversity of constituencies'.⁵ These two categories are of core relevance to Ash's access to theatre. The first is concerned with his right as a citizen to have theatre provided, in line with both Article 31 and the DES; with the second concerned with his disenfranchisement within a group labelled as 'marginalised'. A third category can be found in Bennett's preface to the second edition, as she defines a 'new alternative in theatre' which reflects a culture other than that from which the audience originates.⁶ This third category is of relevance to Ash in terms of his being able to access cultures beyond his own through the art form of theatre. Bennett's description of 'the new alternative' in terms of multi-culturalisation and globalisation needs a wider definition for disabled audiences for whom the notion of 'non-disablement' is a valid alternative and additional culture.

My interest in Bennett's notion of audience evolution from passive to active is key to developing a discourse for Ash, as it

⁴ Bennett, p. 7.

⁵ Bennett, vii.

⁶ Bennett, viii.

exemplifies the desire of theatre-makers to involve the audience directly in the dramatic action of the narrative. This is a stance that I feel is central to creating accessible theatre for PMLD audiences and will be examined in greater detail in the chapters that follow. Bennett refers to alternative models as 'non-traditional theatre' and charts their development from the 1960s to the early 1990s. This new level of involvement created the need for custom-built content and increased participation in the theatre-making process itself. Bennett summarises this shift:

Now so much non-traditional theatre restores the participative energies of the theatre spectator. That spectator has become the subject of the drama.⁷

However, I have some difficulty accepting Bennett's dualistic view of the schism between dominant cultural ideologies and the alternative or oppositional movement. This is because she does not recognise the responsibility of dominant ideologies to create theatre accessible to, and involving, marginalised groups. The preamble to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, within which Article 31 is situated, refers to the 'equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family' and thus suggests that dominant cultural ideologies should encompass *everyone* as a matter of both principle and practice.⁸

⁷ Bennett, p. 209.

⁸ United Nations, 1989.

In *The Politics of Performance* however, Kershaw softens Bennett's dualistic definition in his more complex description of how dominant and alternative theatre have a more symbiotic relationship.⁹ Placing them in a post-war UK-centric political context, he describes how gradual mainstreaming of alternative forms eventually alters the cultural landscape permanently. Kershaw's exploration of how these two positions co-exist is thus rather more malleable than Bennett's. He describes the diachronic process of how theatre, once perceived as being marginal, is transformed into the new mainstream, citing the example of how street performance changed from being scorned by the cultural mainstream to being encouraged as a signifier of urban regeneration:

Within or alongside the dominant ideologies other, oppositional, ideologies may struggle for cultural space and may sometimes even modify the dominant ideologies to a significant degree.¹⁰

I believe that Kershaw's neo-Marxist viewpoint allows for a multiplicity of dominant ideologies rather than a single monolithic ideology and thus his examination of the efficacy of performance focuses on the power that this can bestow on culturally marginalised groups. For both Bennett and Kershaw, emancipation and empowerment for disenfranchised groups is demonstrated by their involvement as both performer and audience. Kershaw describes the

⁹ Baz Kershaw, *The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention* (London: Routledge, 1992).

¹⁰ Kershaw, p. 20.

inextricable alignment of local communities as a force for change, with the increasing prevalence of alternative theatre companies in the 1970s enabling a multitude of empowered voices, self-determined in origin and free from cultural homogeneity. Although not writing with specific reference to PMLD audiences, he describes the potency of community theatre companies in their empowerment of specific audience groups which, when combined with all of the other plays with their specific audiences, created a conglomeration of empowered groups who had, until that point, been marginal to the dominant cultural ideology. This re-affirming of identity was most effective, in Kershaw's view, when comprising both performance 'to' and performance 'by' local communities. It took place:

....through the democratisation of culture (taking the best of theatre to the culturally oppressed); and through cultural democracy (creating theatre with the oppressed).¹¹

Kershaw's chronicling of both reception and production of alternative theatre is more extensive than Bennett's, recognising theatre for disability (although not PMLD audiences) along with theatre-in-education and reminiscence theatre. Here, he focuses solely on disabled people as *producers* of theatre, and examines the notion that the marginal becomes mainstream over time. I would argue that the work of pioneering disabled *performers* who made the transition from marginal to mainstream has paved the way in making it more

¹¹ Kershaw, p. 10.

likely that Ash and his peers will have a mainstream presence as *audiences* in the future. Disabled people are already visible within mainstream theatre as performers. This presence of 'otherness' as a performative act of cultural democracy will, I hope, lead to the further democratisation of culture for PMLD audiences.

Graeae

To explore this issue further, I now examine the roots and genesis of theatre for disability. Graeae Theatre Company is an example of a group which Bennett would define as 'oppositional', emerging from Kershaw's conglomeration of previously disempowered groups before entering the mainstream. Richard Tomlinson charts this process in his examination of the company's work and offers a useful definition as to why performance was so empowering to disenfranchised groups in general, and to disabled people in particular, during the 1980s.¹² Tomlinson describes the positioning of Graeae as a community of performers who wished to disrupt the mythologies surrounding disabilities, using both form and content as its *modus operandi*. That is, to allow the audience to see stories about otherness presented through actors who themselves embody otherness. This is an example of a marginalised community deliberately utilising its marginalisation in order to empower itself as a change-agent and, far from fulfilling Goodley's fears that such labelling can be counter-

¹² Richard Tomlinson, *Disability, Theatre and Education* (London: Souvenir Press, 1982).

productive, actually enabled the company to challenge exclusionary practices, rather than perpetuate them.

Tomlinson suggests that, for any performer, the very act of performing is to be in a position of power, regardless of the role being performed. He writes:

... for a disabled person it can be nothing short of revolutionary. For it is not generally accepted by society that disabled people are initiators of activities, that they are in charge, or can take command.¹³

These revolutionary events, however, were initially challenging to create. Tomlinson charts the difficulties encountered by the company during their early performances, when the theatre-going public saw performers with disabilities for the first time. Throughout their early tours, the company played to tiny audiences, battled with difficult access to theatre spaces and accommodation, and survived disability-related transport issues. Now, the company tours both nationally and internationally, receives ACE funding, and co-runs professional training courses for disabled performers. Over thirty years, the work of Graeae has inspired mainstream arts bodies to modify their previously unenlightened views on disability, resulting in the increasing visibility of disabled performers.

While this fits with Kershaw's model of democratisation, Tomlinson provides no examination of the specific challenges of

¹³ Tomlinson, p. 10.

performing to disabled *audiences*. He describes the 'severely handicapped children' (sic) who were taking part in a Graeae workshop as 'having little idea what was going on'.¹⁴ Clearly the sensory impairment of the participants was a huge challenge and one which the company did not, and still do not, begin to address. The 'revolutionary' and pioneering emancipation which he describes belongs to disabled *performers*, not disabled *audiences* who simply had to tolerate 'having little idea' of both the form and content of the workshop. This notion is at the core of the complex task of emancipating such audiences from their otherness and it is one to which I return repeatedly throughout this thesis.

Frames

Bennett's concept of 'outer and inner frames' helps illuminate the ways in which Ash, despite 'having little idea' might access both the cultural form, and fictional content, of theatre.¹⁵ Bennett defines the frames as follows:

The outer frame contains all those cultural elements which create and inform the theatrical event. The inner frame contains the dramatic production in a particular performance space. The audience is positioned within these two frames and, perhaps most importantly, at their points of intersection.¹⁶

¹⁴ Tomlinson, p. 78.

¹⁵ Bennett, p. 140.

¹⁶ Bennett, p. 139.

While Bennett's definitions of such frames are in some ways central to this thesis, there are two key issues that arise. Firstly, her work analyses audiences from the supposition that there is an active personal choice involved in attending a theatre piece, a choice reliant on an understanding of the outer frame which informs it. Secondly, she assumes that the audience will have a pre-existing understanding of 'theatreness', which enables them to access the cultural signs through which the inner frame is constructed.

Outer Frame

Within care settings, including the family home, Ash may have some degree of autonomy in decision-making on a basic level, such as what clothes to wear or what to eat. These choices however may be limited to a 'this one or that one' model of choice such as: 'would you like to wear the green trousers or the red ones?' When it comes to offering choices about activities that take place outside the home or classroom, those choices become more challenging. They rely on using communication systems, such as PECS, to make requests and choices.¹⁷ These symbols are 'one removed' from the activity itself. Informed choice relies on Ash's capacity to infer meaning from the symbol and clearly that is only possible if he has previous experience of what is being offered to him. Herbert Blau writes: 'An audience without a history is not an audience': without such a history, Ash is

¹⁷ PECS: Picture Exchange Communication System. A system, designed for use with people on the autistic spectrum, whereby a single picture is used to request a desired item

unable to make an informed choice.¹⁸ Therefore, if he attends the theatre, he is likely to do so because someone else *has* the history in place and deems it to be of worth, with the decision being based on *their* past experience or 'specific cultural competence'.¹⁹ In Roland Barthes' terms, the companion complies with the definition of a 'non-innocent reader' of a cultural event:

... theatre is attended by the 'non-innocent' spectator whose world view, cultural understanding or placement, class and gender condition and shape her/his response.²⁰

This does not, however, take into account the fact that Ash may not be able to progress beyond 'innocence' as a result of his limited access to cultural conditioning. He may not have had the opportunity to construct a 'history' or a 'competence'. Ash's view of the world, and thus his capacity to create these cultural constructs, is likely to be defined by cognitive or sensory restrictions affecting his capacity to access anything beyond himself and his immediate environment. This does not mean that these constructs should be denied him. It simply means that he needs to be enabled to make his *own* history, and build his *own* competence, according to his sensory and cognitive capacity. This notion, which is reliant upon Ash being able to access, and practise, audienceness, does not, as yet, have a place in either dominant or alternative discourse.

¹⁸ Herbert Blau, 'Odd, Anonymous Needs: the audience in a dramatized society', *Performing Arts Journal*, 10, 1 (1987), 34-42.

¹⁹ Pearson and Shanks, p. 56.

²⁰ Roland Barthes, *S/Z*, trans. by Richard Miller (London: Jonathan Cape, 1975), p. 10.

Thus, in the theatre-going partnership between Ash and his companion, there may be two contrasting, yet interconnected, outer frames operating at the same time: a 'diversity of publics', in Susan Suleiman's terms.²¹ A number of universally recognised pre-suppositions which define theatre-going, such as the function of the theatre space, the social behaviour associated with it, and the willing suspension of disbelief required within it, are unlikely to be recognised by Ash. If this is the case, he will need his companion to act as a cultural translator in the co-creation of his history and even then he may not cognitively understand its purpose. The companion, who performs the role of gate-keeper to the theatre event, *will* have developed her own individual, neuro-typical sense of audienceness and will therefore have constructed her outer frame. However, the companion's outer frame is likely to be *adapted* as a result of her gatekeeper role, and thus may be significantly different to the outer frames of other non-disabled audience members. Ash is likely to have a prismatic effect on his companion's outer frame, adjusting the trajectory of expectations. Put simply, his companion is likely to need to carry both Ash's frame and her own simultaneously.

Jauss's term, 'horizon of expectations' is useful here in the context of performance where, in this case, Ash may have no 'preceding experience' in contrast to his companion who will be aware

²¹ *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation*, ed. by Susan R Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 4.

of theatre and the cultural signals which define it.²² This creates a multifarious dynamic which operates between Ash, his companion, the actors, non-disabled audience members and the play, both inside and outside the theatre building. Bennett writes of the complexity of this dynamic:

Each public will clearly have a different horizon of expectations, and these can coexist among different publics in any given society.²³

Developing this notion of co-existing publics, with specific reference to children as audience members, Shifra Schonmann writes: 'when we speak of theatre for infants or theatre for children, adults always accompany the young people. As a result, the audience is no longer homogeneous but heterogeneous and not only heterogeneous but extremely polarized'.²⁴ She explains Jauss's horizon of expectations in terms of a 'complex stratum in which the more homogeneous the audience is, the more similar the outer reaction is expected to be'.²⁵ Schonmann's implication is that the more heterogeneous the audience, the greater the number of reactions will be visible, and the less predictable those reactions are likely to be. The unique presence of Ash, along with his companion's management of two frames at the same time, significantly increases the complexity of the strata, and

²² Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception*, trans. by Timothy Bahti (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p. 20.

²³ Bennett, p. 94.

²⁴ Schonmann, p. 63.

²⁵ Schonmann, p. 62.

number of visible reactions. Thus there is a multiplicity of horizons of expectations within the body of the audience in this context.

Part of the companion's horizon of expectations is informed by her need to tackle, on Ash's behalf, a series of barriers to access. Describing the challenges facing people with special needs who wish to take part in arts activities, Phillipa Warin wrote in 1984:

... there were major problems to be overcome. These were mainly transport difficulties, the availability of staff and volunteers as escorts and helpers, access to buildings, lack of information about what is available and whom to contact, and the suitability of arts programmes and activities on offer.²⁶

This illustrates the fact that the companion has responsibility for Ash's access to outer frame components beyond those which are *culturally* determined, in the form of caring-related challenges not relevant to a non-caring audience member. These challenges might be the difficulty of the journey to get to the theatre; the accessibility of the theatre building; the possible reaction of other theatre-goers to perceived otherness; the degree of specialist skills offered by the theatre staff in creating a fulfilling experience for Ash; the reality of dealing with personal care needs in a fifteen minute interval and the need to respond to Ash's communication needs in a quiet auditorium. These factors informing the outer frame, within which sits the horizon

²⁶ Philippa Warin, 'Artshare', in *Theatre Papers. Theatre and Communities: A Council of Europe Workshop. 5*, ed. by Peter Hulton (Totnes: The Documentation Unit, Dartington College of Arts, 1984), p. 227.

of expectations, are all in addition to the companion's own personal anticipation of the theatre event based on previous visits in both a caring and non-caring role.

Although there has been progress in terms of access for people with visual, auditory and mobility impairment since Warin's article, there are still numerous challenges which impact on the partnership between Ash and his companion.²⁷ In addition to the systemic barriers, there are some further factors to consider regarding the companion's personal motivation to overcome these challenges alongside Ash. For example, to what extent might she perceive the theatre visit as an empowering (and thus political) experience for herself and Ash? It might be the case that the inner frame can only be reached if Ash and his companion undertake the role of resourceful adventurers as they try to overcome the barriers within a cultural milieu that claims 'access for all'.²⁸ Alternatively, the visit may be less altruistic, with the companion anticipating an opportunity to abdicate temporarily the responsibilities associated with the companion role, whilst someone else takes over as provider of stimuli for the duration of the performance. The destination of the inner frame may, therefore, be a place of stimulus for Ash but one of pleasurable refuge for his companion.

²⁷ *Access-Ability Express*. Leaflet published by New Wolsey Theatre, Ipswich, Spring 2009.
Unicorn Theatre Access page: <http://unicorntheatre.com/venue-info/access> [accessed June 2012]

²⁸ Arts Council England Press Office, *Great Art for Everyone* (2008).
<http://artscouncil.org.uk/Content/Detail>. [accessed February 2009] (no pagination available)

A third factor in this complex outer frame-making arrangement is the effect that Ash and his companion and are likely to have on the stability of the horizon of expectations of other people in the audience. Supporting the social model of disability, Richard Manners contextualises the need for companions to model normative behaviour, and writes:

I believe that for people with learning difficulties, the learning difficulty is not a problem in itself. The real obstacle is other people's often-negative perception of that person and, in turn, the person with a learning difficulty's perception of the way that they are being negatively viewed.... Some people with learning difficulties exhibit behaviour which we may find strange, but it is actually our inability to recognize these behaviours as valid and acceptable which further alienates the individual with learning difficulties from the community.²⁹

In the population at large, three quarters of people have not met anyone with a learning disability and the presence of such people at theatre performances is rare indeed.³⁰ Ash is unlikely to have a place on the horizon of expectations of other people simply because the theatre-going population has not previously experienced sharing any sort of social space with him or his peers. Thus the role of the

²⁹ Richard Manners, 'A Personal Journey', in : *Drawing on Difference. Art Therapy with people who have Learning Difficulties*, ed. by Mair Rees (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 94.

³⁰ Roy McConkey, *Northern Ireland Omnibus Survey-European Year of Disabled Persons* (Belfast EYPD Committee, 2004).

companion may extend to normalising Ash's socially unfamiliar behaviours by modelling how others should relate to him. I am suggesting here that if the companion takes responsibility for modelling normative behaviour towards otherness to the rest of the audience, she positions herself in the role of *performer* for the duration of time between arrival at, and leaving from, the theatre building. Bennett's 'emancipation of the spectator' in the context of disability might simply be interpreted as Ash's right to be free from unwanted and voyeuristic attention. Ash is vulnerable to the indignity of being placed unintentionally within the inner frame and being perceived as part of the performance itself: to be the watched rather than the watcher. I would suggest that a definition of dignity – a central tenet of Article 31- lies with Ash being sufficiently socially accepted to comfortably co-habit the theatre alongside others, accessing the performance as a shared and equal experience.

As a result of the factors outlined above, I would suggest that the outer frames for Ash, his companion, and the other members of the audience are inextricably interlinked. The presence of a learning disabled audience member adds a layer of complexity onto the already complex arrangement of frames and their makers.

Frame Convergence

The transformative moment when the inner frame joins the outer frame is usually a time replete with anticipation. This moment marks the beginning of an 'ideological transaction', outlined by Kershaw:

Ideology is the source of the collective ability of performers and audience to make more or less common sense of the signs used in performance... ideology provides the framework within which companies encode and audiences decode the signifiers of performance.³¹

In his outlining of *collective* ability, Kershaw assumes a universal capacity for decoding the signifiers of the frame convergence. In the spirit of Article 31, I would suggest that it is more useful to consider Ash's *individual* decoding needs as he may not be fluent in reading the signs that transform the 'here and now' into the 'there and then' of the performed fiction.³² Adding to Kershaw's thoughts on this, Keir Elam writes:

The theatre-goer will accept that, at least in dramatic representations, an alternative and fictional reality is to be presented by individuals designated as the performers, and that his own role with respect to that represented reality is to be that of privileged 'onlooker'.³³

As Colin Counsell argues:

³¹ Kershaw, p. 16.

³² Schechner, p. 190.

³³ Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 88.

Cues will be available for establishing when the transformation is to begin and when it is to end, namely brackets in time within which and to which the transformation is to be restricted.³⁴

I would argue that Ash may have no concept of 'brackets in time' as demarcatory indicators of the existence of a fictitious experience, or indeed the cognitive capacity predicated by Elam as underpinning the role of 'privileged onlooker'. In theatre buildings, the need for the audience to focus on this represented reality is often signalled by a change of light-state, or in theatre spaces where there are limited technical facilities, there may be no specific signal at all. The very fact that the audience *knows* it is attending a play is sufficient to prepare it for the transformative moment when actors inhabit the performance space. In western culture in the 21st century, the non-disabled theatre-goer is likely to have a horizon of expectations which is about diminishing noise, bodies settling into comfortable positions, interaction diminishing with those around them and the gradual disappearance of the immediate environment. For a non-disabled member of the audience, the dimming of the lights heralds a portentous moment rich with expectation. For Ash, it may just be getting dark slowly. If the audience waits in hushed anticipation for the fiction to start, Ash may just be sitting in a quiet room. He may

³⁴ Colin Counsell, *Signs of Performance: an introduction to twentieth century theatre* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 27.

experience Barthes' 'innocence' in relation to changes in his immediate sensory environment. Pearson and Shanks state that: 'Modern auditoria are sociofugal, throwing spectators apart, limiting their eye contact, discouraging social action'.³⁵ This has significant implications for Ash because his diminishing interaction with his companion, who is required to conform to the quiet state of audienceness, may create potentially stressful solitude, along with a breaking of connection with the external world. Ash may be uncertain as to what is going to happen in the quiet darkness. There may be feelings of isolation associated with this, requiring verbal or tactile reassurances from his companion. Additionally, if non-PMLD members of an audience are unable to ignore Ash's behaviours, due to lack of experience of sharing social and cultural space together, then there will be some swift re-drawing of their horizon of expectations, especially in performance situations which are predicated by stillness, quiet and audience passivity.

Historically, a quiet and dark performance space has not always been the desired state for theatre, with the groundlings in Shakespeare's time commenting on the dramatic action and the Italian Futurists encouraging visceral engagement with the play. Filippo Marinetti, Emilio Settimelli and Bruno Corra write with regard to enlivening the hushed and darkened theatre space:

³⁵ Pearson and Shanks, p. 108.

(To) symphonize the audience's sensibility by exploring it, stirring up its laziest layers with every means possible: eliminate the preconception of the footlights by throwing nets of sensation between stage and audience; the stage action will invade the orchestra seats, the audience.³⁶

I would suggest that Ash may well have been more at ease in these contexts, amidst the 'throwing of sensory nets', and his individuality of response within this interactive, 'dialogical space' would have been celebrated rather than serve as a trigger for curiosity and cultural disruption.³⁷

Inner Frame

Just as a consideration of Bennett's outer frame reveals key access issues for Ash, an examination of the inner frame of performance is similarly useful. She describes the inner frame as the 'fictional stage world' which is composed of a series of signs and signals operating within two systems: those of the actor and those exterior to the actor such as set, props, lighting, sound and music.³⁸ The performed text is ignited by the interaction of these two systems and within the first few moments of a performance a new horizon of expectation is created. Bennett states:

³⁶ Filippo Marinetti, Emilio Settimelli and Bruno Corra, 'The Futurist Synthetic Theatre', in *Twentieth Century Theatre: A Sourcebook*, ed. by Richard Drain (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 21.

³⁷ Counsell, p. 21.

³⁸ Bennett. p. 2

...the audience inevitably proceeds through the construction of hypotheses about the fictional world which are subsequently substantiated, revised or negated.³⁹

For Ash this 'proceeding' is by no means 'inevitable' as the interpretation of these signs and signals may not be possible. Elam explains further the cultural competence required to proceed into the inner frame and introduces the idea of 'disattendance':

This firm cognitive division is usually reinforced by symbolic, spatial or temporal boundary markers of 'brackets' – the stage, the dimming of the lights, the curtain, the banging of wooden clappers (as in Chinese theatre), etc. - which allow a more precise definition of what is included in and what is excluded from the frame in space and time. Given the conventional basis of the frame, great importance attaches to the audience's willingness to 'disattend' those events agreed to be excluded from it.⁴⁰

Tim Webb, founder of Oily Cart Theatre Company specialising in work for PMLD audiences, acknowledges that Ash may not be able to filter out features of the space that are extraneous to the performance such as the 'black walls, ironmongery and the lighting grid'.⁴¹ Elam's 'conventional basis' as the means by which audiences construct such filters alludes to a learned construct accessed through a cultural,

³⁹ Bennett, p. 140.

⁴⁰ Elam, p. 88.

⁴¹ Unpublished interview with Tim Webb, Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London. 13/12/2010

cognitive process. This in turn suggests that without being fluent in the codes, non-learning disabled audiences are unlikely to be able to access the systems put in place by writer, director and actors. The extrapolation of this discourse leads to Ash's exclusion, because his capacity to decode, and therefore access meaning, may not be in place.

Bennett alludes to the complex process undertaken by non-disabled audiences to make meaning within the inner frame, stating that: 'Interpretation of the stage sign usually goes beyond its immediate signified, often utilizing several connotative possibilities.'⁴² These 'multi-valent components' may be problematic for Ash as he is unlikely to be able to decode these layers of form as described by Bennett.⁴³ Elam posits that objects take on a secondary meaning when they are placed on a stage, suggesting that the inner frame has a transformative effect on the people and things that are within it.⁴⁴ For Ash, the things within the frame may well remain as things, and the actors may just be people talking and moving around. Similarly Elam's description of the process of 'transcodification' suggests that such theatre will be extremely challenging for Ash:

The replacement.... of scenic indicators by gesture or verbal reference involves the process of *transcodification*: a given semantic unit (say, a 'door') is signified by the linguistic or

⁴² Bennett, p. 69.

⁴³ Bennett, p. 67.

⁴⁴ Elam, p. 7.

gestural system rather than by the architectural or pictorial, as often occurs in mime.⁴⁵

Elam assumes here that all people who attend theatre performances can take part in a 'motivated act of inference' in order to make meaning.⁴⁶ Decoding denotation in its simplest form may be possible for Ash but the development of that decoding into connotation may be impossible. For example, some sighted PMLD people would simply see stage blood as red liquid, while others may understand that it denotes blood, but in all cases it is unlikely that any would have the capacity to abstract further into the connotation of meanings such as 'treachery' or 'betrayal'.

Therefore, Ash will need significant support in knowing where to focus his attention to make meaning from the signs operating within the inner frame. He may be challenged in his capacity to disattend actions or sounds that the theatre-makers deem unimportant in the hierarchising of signs – Webb's ironmongery - for example. At a very basic level, proxemics, design features and lighting effects, all of which the theatre-maker uses to 'foreground' elements of the play, may simply be taking place too far away from Ash for him to notice them.⁴⁷ Webb writes about the limitations of actor/audience proxemics when working with PMLD people:

⁴⁵ Elam, p. 15.

⁴⁶ Elam, p. 20.

⁴⁷ Elam, p. 18

Most theatre is still about a group of people at one end of a room, looking at a smaller group of people at the other end of the room. If some of the audience can't hear and others can't see, this is not an effective model of theatre for them.⁴⁸

Webb's suggestion that theatre is often performed at too great a physical distance from Ash has relevance to Bennett's understanding of oppositional theatre and its desire to have a transformational effect on the audience by changing its members from being passive observers to 'productive and emancipated' participants. I would suggest that in order for Ash to connect with theatre in an emancipatory way, the first step is for him to access its signing systems through his available and preferred sensory channels and that this probably involves him being in the *midst* of the theatreness. Bennett assumes that the audience will be able to sufficiently access the signing systems within the inner frame in order to facilitate connectivity and she defines this process as the unshackling of the audience member to enable them 'to think and to act'.⁴⁹ I would argue that, in Ash's case, the emancipation is, and should be, concerned not with being required to think or act, but simply in enabling him to access the narrative in ways appropriate to his individual needs. Crucial to this notion is the individuality of his sensory needs and preferences. For some PMLD people, the number

⁴⁸ Tim Webb, *The ASSITEJ Book, 2004/5* (Germany: ASSITEJ, 2005), p. 197.
ASSITEJ is the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People.

⁴⁹ Bennett, p. 1.

of sensory channels available to them is limited, making the provision of extra-stimulus of the remaining senses crucial to their functionality as members of an audience. As Andy Kempe notes:

..we come to know the world through our senses. In the case of most people, there are five senses that can give information about the world but some people have fewer, which inevitably results in their coming to know the world in a different way.⁵⁰

It can be inferred therefore, that Ash can come to know *theatre* in a different way. Despite Blau's belief that an audience without a cultural understanding of the conventions of theatre is not an audience at all, I would argue that Ash can inhabit a theatrical moment in an embodied, emotional way, free from the need for such cultural understanding. Bert O States calls this the 'embodiment of affective corporeality' which is part of the 'certain thingness' of theatre.⁵¹ This begins to describe a way in which Ash and his peers might experience theatre.

It is likely that a palette of multi-sensory signs, as alluded to above, is required to enable Ash to make meaning within the inner frame, yet such an approach is outside the realm of much existing semiotic analysis. Elaine Aston and George Savona write, with reference to the shortcomings of audience reception theory, that:

⁵⁰ *Drama Education and Special Needs*, ed. by Andy Kempe (Cheltenham: Stanley Thornes, 1996), p. 7.

⁵¹ Bert O States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: on the Phenomenology of Theatre* (Berkeley: University of California, 1985), p. 20.

... semiotics is faced with its own limitation, its openness to the charge of reductiveness due to a dominant (some would argue, an exclusive) interest in formal properties.⁵²

This is partly because sensory performance, for which such reductiveness is anathema, defies formality. It requires that the performers draw on intuition, empathy and sensitivity in order to ascertain how the audience members are feeling, customising their work to facilitate connectivity with *individual* audience members, thus rendering most semiotic classification inappropriate. The generalities inherent in seeking patterns in theatre semiotics do not allow for involvement of the sensorium in its entirety as an access point for meaning-making. As Andre Lepecki and Sally Banes state:

[theatre] historians, theorists, and critics have either totally ignored certain senses and certain sensorial experiences or, at best, relegated them to the periphery of critical attention and of theoretical investigation....a whole plethora of sensorial information in performance has been discarded, unnoticed and poorly documented.⁵³

Much of this is, of course, due to very little being available in the corpus of performed work that explores the possibilities of multi-sensory communication, with the result that semioticians only have rare opportunities to apply their paradigms to this type of theatre.

⁵² Elaine Aston and George Savona, *Theatre as Sign System* (London, Routledge, 1991), p. 180.

⁵³ Andre Lepecki and Sally Banes, *The Senses in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 2.

For Ash, understanding the signals within the inner frame might be defined as 'sense-experience', not requiring that any denotable meaning be placed on that which is being sensed.⁵⁴ He and his peers, due to their cognitive or sensory impairment, may not have the capacity to be objective or reflexive and their understanding of performance may be reliant on the somatic route, defined by Philip B. Zarrilli as 'knowledge gained through the body'.⁵⁵ Within theatre for non-disabled audiences, there is an emphasis on the visual and acoustic channels, with an assumption that meaning can only be accessed at a distance and processed in the brain resulting in cognitive, rather than somatic, understanding of those meanings. In semiotic terms, the signified, loaded with meaning, travel via visual and aural signifiers from a place where the performers are, to a place where the audience is: a uni-directional communication pathway. In order to 'see' or understand these meanings, the audience needs to be placed some distance from the origin of the pathway, in both ocular and cognitive terms.

In contrast, in developing theatre for PMLD audiences, multi-sensory signification may enable Ash to access *meaning* even though his cognitive processes may not be in place to reach an intellectual or cultural *understanding*. In describing his work in adapting Homer's

⁵⁴ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (Abingdon, Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 3.

⁵⁵ Philip B. Zarrilli, 'Senses and Silence in Actor Training and Performance' in *The Senses in Performance* (New York: Routledge, 2007), p. 58.

Odyssey for PMLD audiences, Keith Park poses some highly pertinent questions that explore such an approach:

How necessary is verbal comprehension to the understanding of poetry and literature? We know that people with profound learning disabilities can enjoy music, so why not the music of words? Do we have to comprehend before we can apprehend? Does the meaning of a poem or story have to be retrieved through a process of decoding individual words, or can it be grasped through a kind of atmosphere created through sound and vision?⁵⁶

Park thus indicates that a new discourse is required to define how Ash might access theatre. At the time of writing this thesis, 'immersive' theatre events, heavily reliant on sensory components, are finding a place within mainstream praxis: Punchdrunk's creation of site-specific pieces, in which the audience members playfully immerse themselves in the action alongside the performers, exemplify this approach and necessitate the need for innovative semiotic analysis. Josephine Machon, examining Punchdrunk's work, describes what she perceives as 'the focus on direct participation with a rekindling of the human senses'.⁵⁷ Acknowledging and valorising the phenomenological nature of embodied meanings as generated in immersive theatre events, she writes that:

⁵⁶ Keith Park, 'Macbeth: a poetry workshop on stage at Shakespeare's Globe Theatre', *British Journal of Special Education*, 29 (2002) 1, p. 14.

⁵⁷ Josephine Machon, *(Syn)aesthetics: redefining visceral performance* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), p. xix.

This fusing of sense (semantic 'meaning making') with *sense* (feeling, both sensation and emotion) establishes a double-edged rendering of making-sense/*sense*-making and foregrounds its fused somatic/semantic nature.⁵⁸

However, Machon's stance remains predicated on the need for the audience to be aware of the cultural construct of the outer frame that is facilitating such emancipation and productivity. Still missing in this discourse is an analysis of the fundamental way in which Ash differs from a non-disabled person in his audienceness. I refer to his capacity to experience the 'differently real' and recognise it as such. This ability of an audience to be reflexive and to have an innate sense of audienceness creates the capability to protect itself from the *actual* emotions enacted within a theatre piece.

Ann Ubersfeld explores the sophistication of this plurality:
... the pleasure of liking and of disliking; the pleasure of understanding and of not understanding.... the pleasure of laughing and crying... the pleasure of enjoying oneself and of suffering.⁵⁹

There are, however, serious ethical considerations about creating these emotional states in Ash if he does not have the capacity for reflexivity, and these considerations will be explored fully throughout the remaining chapters of this thesis.

⁵⁸ Machon, p. 14.

⁵⁹ Ann Ubersfeld, 'The Pleasure of the Spectator', trans. Bouillaguet, P and Jose, C. *Modern Drama*, 25 (1982), 1 p. 127.

Current theories of audience reception, as I have discussed in this chapter have limited direct applicability to Ash. However, I have acknowledged that Bennett's theory of outer and inner frames and their interdigitation are a useful starting point for new discourse. I argued that enabling Ash to develop an understanding of the outer frame is currently fraught with barriers, reflecting negative social attitudes to otherness, alongside cultural limitations developed diachronically and operating systemically. These barriers exist within a socio-cultural environment which allegedly strives to create equality of opportunity amongst marginalised groups across all areas of life, as typified by Article 31 and ACE guidelines. I argued that further development of specialist theatre-making within this context would broaden the sign-systems available to the theoretician and practitioner. In the next chapter I consider the work of two theatre companies who currently specialise in creating pieces for Ash, alongside my own work as a teacher and theatre-maker. In doing so, I will explore theoretical discourse underpinning multi-sensory theatre in greater detail.

Chapter Two

The Multi-sensory Approach: examining the work of two theatre companies that create theatre for PMLD audiences.

The chapter begins in Jasmine's school hall within which a theatre space has been built. A theatre company specialising in work for PMLD audiences, is visiting the school.

Lesley:

Wow, Jas. Come on. This is our pod. We'll sit next to each other and put our safety harnesses on.

Jasmine:

This person making music is wearing a big red and white hat. It bounces as she plays. This chair is not fixed to the ground.

Jasmine climbs carefully into the pod chair, supported by two performers and a musician who plays a violin and sings Jasmine's name repeatedly. The pod is slowly winched two metres off the ground.

Lesley cannot believe the expression of elation on Jasmine's face.

Jasmine:

Swing the pod. Swing the pod. Swing the pod.

Two aerialists slowly unfurl from fabric dens at the top of the space and one of them stops in front of Jasmine's pod, engaging her with direct eye contact.

Aerialist:

Should we swing in the pod?

Jasmine:

Yes. Yes. Yes. Yes.

Everyone swings.

This chapter considers the work of two professional theatre companies, Bamboozle and Oily Cart, who seek to engage PMLD audiences. Positioning their work within the issues raised in Chapter One, I examine ways in which these companies seek engagement with such audiences, including working within micro-theatre spaces utilising multi-sensory interactivities, before discussing the extent to which such engagement is achieved. I consider the degree to which the work of these companies is at odds with ACE funded regional producing houses whose involvement will be key to making such theatre available to PMLD audiences more widely. In addition, I argue that the work of Bamboozle and Oily Cart does not meet the full theatrical requirements of a PMLD audience due to sensory interactivity, rather than emotionally-rich dramatic narrative, being at its core. Finally, I make the case for the power of the three theatre

spectra as key tools to enhance engagement in emotional narratives, which I argue are currently lacking from these companies' practice.

Bamboozle and Oily Cart

In 2011, as part of a collaborative project emerging from this thesis, I worked as part of a UK team whose remit was to carry out an international audit of theatre companies specialising in disability theatre for children and young people. The purpose of the group was to share this data with delegates during a focus day, hosted by the UK team, at the biennial ASSITEJ conference held in Malmo and Copenhagen.¹ My particular responsibility was to investigate companies who created work for profoundly disabled audiences. Bamboozle and Oily Cart, both based in the UK and whose work I was already aware of, emerged from this process as being the only two companies who create work specifically for Bud and his peers, with their work internationally regarded as being innovative within this field.²

Bamboozle, founded in 1994 by Christopher Davies and Sue Pyecroft, and Oily Cart, founded in 1981 by Tim Webb and Claire de Loon, create multi-sensory theatre for young people labelled as having complex disabilities. They both receive funding from a range of sources, including ACE, and define themselves as providing a

¹ ASSITEJ is the International Association of Theatre for Children and Young People. Data can be visited at: <http://www.tya-uk.org/site/news/inclusive-theatre.html>

² This is not to say that there are not other specialist companies, or freelance individuals doing this work, but they were not found as part of this audit, which was limited by finance and time.

service to local young people, but also respond to both national and international requests for performances. In addition to their PMLD work, Oily Cart specialises in pieces for under-fives and their families, while Bamboozle makes theatre for severe learning disabled young people, including those on the autistic spectrum and those with moderate learning disabilities, provides inclusive workshops for disabled and non-disabled young people, and creates events for families. Both companies were founded through visionary partnerships between artistic directors and theatre designers.

The genesis of both companies began with a response to demand from schools and care settings who wanted their pupils/clients to experience theatre. Service-providers felt that neither building-based theatre (mainstream or alternative) nor theatre-in-education provided the multi-sensory, flexible approach necessary for Bud and his peers. Bamboozle and Oily Cart, however, guided by an iterative process, place the receptivity of their audiences at the centre of their theatre-making. Both companies undertake a careful preparation process with their audiences and therefore much of their work takes place within special schools; in order for the companies to get to know Bud's sensory preferences prior to the performance, they need to know where to *find* him in order to work alongside him. They know where he (along with the others who will be experiencing the piece) will be located before, and after, the performance, thus assisting the development of the

relationship between Bud, his companion, and the professional theatre-makers. In addition to this relationship-building function, their approach supports the development of cultural competencies and horizons of expectations within their audiences. The key importance of this tripodal relationship between Bud, his companion and the performers will be returned to later in this chapter and subsequently within the thesis.

Micro-theatres

Central to the work of both companies, and reflective of the importance placed on theatre design within the creative process, is the construction of a specialist space within which the performance takes place. These spaces, which I term 'micro-theatres', serve the diverse sensory needs of Bud and his peers, facilitating interactivity, and enabling performances to take place within non-theatre buildings. Christopher Davies, Artistic Director of Bamboozle, records the importance of the space as a blank canvas within which the multi-sensory discourse can flourish:

Each environment has been carefully put together to be multi-sensory - to be accessible to participants who may not be able to see very well, those who can't hear or those who have tactile aversions. We provide lots of different stimuli within each environment (live and recorded music, interesting objects, a variety of materials and textures, a range of lighting effects,

olfactory stimuli etc.) to ensure that every individual can engage with, or be challenged by, at least some of the elements within it.³

These micro-theatres are helpful in foregrounding action, ensuring maximum stimulation and minimising extraneous stimuli from the world both inside and outside the structure. Such spaces enable Bud and his companion to be *amidst* the performance and performers, bringing people *together*, rather than isolating them, as the frames converge. Micro-theatres function as palettes within which the five senses can be sampled, offering physically comfortable personal space and leaving the performers free to interact with the audience. Light and sound intensity can be carefully controlled within the micro-theatre to influence the energy and mood of the audience and they serve as a demarcation between the familiar and unfamiliar. On a purely logistical level, they offer the companies the continuity of a familiar performance space without having to re-work technical systems within each new venue. They are, in effect, portable theatres.

In their past productions, Oily Cart has created micro-theatres made of inflatable plastic, draped silk, stretched canvas and padded scaffolding poles. Bamboozle created a piece that took place inside a giant fabric jelly-fish. In order to address Webb's 'ironmongery' issue, designers utilise the rigid structural components of the micro-theatre

³ Christopher Davies, *Creating Multi-sensory Environments* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2012), p. 1.

to incorporate lighting and sound rigs wherever possible, with the result that distracting views of wires and lanterns are minimised. This is especially important for Bud, as his autism means that his senses are likely to be stimulated by light or sound *sources* rather than the effects they create. In semiotic terms, micro-theatres make it easier to hide the signifier so that Bud can concentrate on the signified.

Erecting the micro-theatre in the school significantly lessens the need for Bud and his companion to take on the mantle of resourceful adventurers in the face of the systemic barriers which I discussed in Chapter One. When arriving at a performance staged by either company, Bud chooses where to sit or lie in the space. He and his companion are welcomed into, and guided towards, their chosen place, with the performers connecting physically with them where appropriate. It is at this point that the investment made in forming relationships prior to the performance is invaluable because, for Bud, entering a new and unusual place inhabited by strangers would be potentially stressful and unsettling. There is not the same social discomfort associated with non-disabled audience members inhabiting the same cultural space as I outlined in the previous chapter. Common to both companies is the emphasis they place on empowering their audiences through appropriate communication.

Intensive Interaction

For both companies, the quality of interaction between Bud and the performers is key to the quality of his access to the performance. As Peter Coia and Jardine Handley explain, a vital part of the interaction is understanding the unique knowledge and communication system of each PMLD student:

..people with learning disabilities and/or autism do not share our 'English' cultural library. Instead they have a different and often unique cultural library, including a language of their own that they use to talk to themselves. This language is not word based and is often sensory in nature. The core task in communicating with people with learning disabilities and/or autism is to learn and to use their unique cultural library.⁴

In order to tune in to Bud's unique cultural library, Oily Cart and Bamboozle use a system of communication developed by Geraint Ephraim.⁵ His technique, called Intensive Interaction, demands that the performer mirrors Bud's own body language and pre-language utterances to build a non-verbal way of communicating with him. Summarising the rationale behind Intensive Interaction, Phoebe Caldwell explains:

When we use Intensive Interaction [with them], our aim is to tap into our partners' internal conversation and shift their

⁴ Pete Coia and Angela Jardine Handley, 'Developing Relationships with People with Profound Learning Disabilities through Intensive Interaction', in *Promoting Social Interaction for Individuals with Communicative Impairments*, ed. by M. Suzanne Zeedyk (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2008), p. 116.

⁵ Geraint Ephraim, *A Brief Introduction to Augmented Mothering* (Radlett: Harperbury Hospital Playtrack Pamphlet, 1986).

attention from solitary self-stimulation to shared activity. What they were doing by themselves becomes the basis of a dialogue. In sensory terms, we can talk to each other.⁶

Meticulous preparation alongside Bud and his peers by both companies prior to the performance means that, when they encounter each other at the entrance to the micro-theatre, they have some elements of a shared communication. This helps to create an horizon of expectation for Bud who recognises that the performers will work in a way familiar to him.

Once the performance is underway, the performers not only rely on Intensive Interaction to connect with Bud, but also on establishing communication pathways with his companion. Webb writes about the importance of companions in interpreting behaviour:

It can be difficult with particular individuals to interpret their body language and other ways of communication. A twist of the head can be a way of indicating delight, and another's way of communicating apprehension. So the performers had to remain aware of the companions' responses.⁷

This is in contrast to much theatre for non-disabled audiences, where, as we have seen in Chapter One, the signifiers within the inner frame operate uni-directionally between the performers and the audience. Schonmann describes the typical dynamic within children's theatre as

⁶ Phoebe Caldwell, 'Intensive Interaction: Getting in Touch with a Child with Severe Autism', in Zeedyk, p. 171.

⁷ Tim Webb, 'Special Needs Audiences', in *The ASSITEJ Book 2004/5: theatre for the world's children and young people*, ed. by Wolfgang Schneider and Tony Mack (Germany: ASSITEJ International, 2005), p. 198.

being 'polarised' between the two audience types: adults and children. Due to the presence of companions within Bamboozle and Oily Cart's work, there is multiplicity of poles, and great emphasis is placed on the importance of intra-audience communication within the performance, thus lessening the stress of sitting in a quiet auditorium. Acquiring fluency in unique cultural libraries is typically a three-way process involving Bud, his companion and the performer symbiotically creating multi-directional communication pathways. As a result of these pathways remaining open throughout the performances of these two companies, the moments when the outer and inner frames conjoin are less defined than in theatre for non-PMLD audiences. As we have seen in Chapter One, within most theatre forms, as schematised by current performance semiology, there is a moment when the outer frame is joined by the inner frame. It is at this point of joining that the performers become the observed and the audience becomes the observers. In the work of Bamboozle and Oily Cart, however, this observer/observed dyad does not necessarily occur, and multi-directional communication pathways remain open. In performances for Bud, the performers watch him as much as he watches the performers. This watchfulness is essential if preference and choice are to be at the centre of the experience, and both of these are key to the values behind Article 31.

The Multi-sensory Approach

In the following description of *Tickled Pink*, Webb encapsulates Oily Cart's approach to multi-sensory engagement:

It is a state of being. It can be a waft of air from a fan or down the bore of a clarinet; the scent of a rose petal, or the touch of velvet; enclosed and secure spaces saturated in colour and heaped with soft scented pillows. It's a drama but there's no story.⁸

As suggested by the above, for some members of the audience the 'state of being' involves them operating polysemically, absorbing the sensory signals multi-systemically. Central to the work of both companies is the importance placed on audience choice of stimuli within their performances. If Bud is offered a choice of ways to access the performance, he is more likely to have, in Bennett's terms, a 'productive and emancipated' experience. Bud is best placed to know how the sensory elements on the 'outside' can join his specific 'inside', thus facilitating access according to his individual needs. In addition, with the range of stimuli available, it is possible that he might choose alternative and unexpected elements to explore. Within both Bamboozle and Oily Cart's work, individually targeted ('polarised') and more general ('collective') stimuli are accessed according to preference to create a personalised sense-experience,

⁸ Webb, 'Special Needs Audiences', p. 197.

drawing on the range of sense possibilities.⁹ Both companies create pieces with simple narratives, often encompassing encounters with fantastical characters that invite the audience to join them on a journey or an adventure. These quests provide the opportunity for multi-sensory interactivities to take place through touch, sight, sound and smell, as the following examples from their practice illustrate.

A notable feature of both companies' work is the importance placed on interacting with the designed environment through touch. Audience members are encouraged to hold objects, and possibly put them in their mouths, to access meaning. In Bamboozle's *Sensory Light and Magic* (2010), children encountered puppets inviting them to travel to an island to meet a king, and there were many objects to touch throughout the piece including treasure, boxes, puppets and fabrics with contrasting textures.¹⁰ In *Jellyfish* (2010), the children were offered head massages from an anemone-like puppet.¹¹ In Oily Cart's *Conference of the Birds* (2005), members of the audience were encouraged to touch an egg-shaped sculpture out of which water was cascading, and fans made of giant leaves provided not only a rich tactile stimulus, but also a source of gentle breezes.¹² In *Blue* (2006), set in a railroad station in the southern USA, performers invited the audience to explore the steel guitar, cloth-clad shakers, a water

⁹ Jindrich Honzl, 'Dynamics of the Sign in the Theatre', in *Modern Theories of Drama*, ed. by George Brandt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) p. 276.

¹⁰ Bamboozle, *Sensory Light and Magic*, (in-house publication on DVD, 2010).

¹¹ Bamboozle Theatre <http://www.bamboozle.co.uk/galleries/videos> [accessed September 2012]

¹² Oily Cart, *25 Years* (in-house publication DVD 2008).

pump and soap suds with their fingers or feet.¹³ Both companies recognise the importance of human touch in their work. Most notably, Oily Cart's *Pool Piece* (2001) placed two students at a time, with performers, in a swimming pool during which there was an inevitable amount of skin contact.

Both Davies and Webb acknowledge the importance of Bud consenting to - or even instigating - touch as a part of his unique cultural library, and that to ignore this consent would be disempowering for him. In *War Horse* (2007) even the lightest of touches was deemed a sensory stimulus, such as the breeze from a fan or the 'breath' of a puppet horse.¹⁴ Despite not strictly being human skin-to-skin contact, Davies recounts breath as communication between a PMLD audience and the *War Horse* puppet:

It neighs, whinnies and snorts and blows through its nostrils which creates great excitement when the children feel the warm air!¹⁵

Davies also uses the haptic to signify the beginning and the end of pieces along with episodes within them. Entry to the *Jellyfish* micro-theatre involved the audience crouching and entering through bubble-wrap fronds and in *Sensory Light and Magic*, each stage of the

¹³ Oily Cart, *25 Years*.

Martin Welton, 'Seeing Nothing: Now Hear This' in *The Senses in Performance*, ed. by Sally Banes and Andre Lepecki (New York and Abingdon: Routledge, 2007) p. 150.

¹⁴ Bamboozle Theatre <http://www.bamboozle.co.uk/galleries/photos> [accessed September 2012]

¹⁵ Davies, Christopher, *Warhorse* (Bamboozle website, posted 15th September 2007), <http://www.bamboozle.co.uk/blpg> [accessed May 2012]

adventure was demarcated by people passing through screen-like structures.

Alongside touch, there are numerous examples of olfactory stimulation being used in the work of both companies. Yi-Fu Tuan suggests why even the most profoundly disabled member of an audience can be observed reacting to aromas:

Smell, compared with sight and hearing, affects our emotions at a more deeply buried level. The olfactory sense is linked to a primitive part of the brain that controls emotions and mood and the involuntary movements of life, including breathing, heartbeat, pupil size, and genital erection.¹⁶

Both companies exemplify Tuan's emphasis on the role of smell to arouse emotional response. In *Blue*, following a noisy and exciting part of the piece, boxes were opened in front of individual audience members and the calming smell of lavender was released. Fragrant essences of thyme and oranges created a sense of place as the children arrived on the island in *Sensory Light and Magic*. During *Pool Piece*, the aroma of soap and washing powder was present to support the story, based on the search for a lost sock in a laundry.

In addition to creating emotional responses, Davies also uses the olfactory sense to mark beginnings and endings in the same way as he uses the haptic. During a residency in Loughborough Town Hall, audience members were wheeled in their chairs across aromatic

¹⁶ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Passing Strange and Wonderful: Aesthetics, Nature and Culture* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1993), p. 35.

chipped bark as they entered, and exited, the performance space.¹⁷ Thus, smell was used to establish what Elam terms the cognitive division, which marks out the beginning and the end of the performance for Bud.

As might be expected from companies who have theatre designers in their artistic directorship, there is a strong emphasis on the visual sense for those audience members who are sighted. In *War Horse*, children saw a life-size bamboo horse puppet and in *Jellyfish*, sea creatures on elastic bounced in reaction to being pulled, to engage the eye. In *Crazy Hair* (2012), puppets and characters emerged from rope screens and performers danced with ribbons of different colours.¹⁸ Both Webb and Davies recognise that PMLD audiences need support to engage with visual design elements. Thus, scenic features within the micro-theatres are highlighted through the use of light, both as a stimulus in its own right, and a means by which focus on character or object is enhanced: both companies use powerful hand-held lights in their work to help Bud access their pieces. In Oily Cart's *Waving* (2001), an actor used this flexible lighting arrangement to encourage audience members to focus on particular objects, or people, within a hydrotherapy pool.¹⁹ In *Jellyfish*, the anemone puppets were lit with rope-lights that pulsed and shone when in proximity to people's heads. The above examples

¹⁷ Christopher Davies, *Multi-sensory Theatre* (Bamboozle website, posted 15th September 2007), <http://www.bamboozle.co.uk/blpg> [accessed May 2012]

¹⁸ Bamboozle Theatre <http://www.bamboozle.co.uk/galleries/videos> [accessed September 2012]

¹⁹ Oily Cart, *25 Years*.

illustrate how stage lighting can exaggerate what Anna Fenemore has called the 'physiological framing of vision', the natural process by which objects become a focus within our field of vision, and it is likely that Bud significantly benefits from this help with foregrounding to maintain his 'fixity of the image'.²⁰

Both companies invest significant talent and budget in the maintenance of high production values, creating interactive visual performance-scapes within their micro-theatres. There are additional considerations in a PMLD context. For example, the proximity of the audience member to the object of vision is likely to be key to successful interactivity and access. Encouraging Bud to move towards, and away from, sources of light, is a distinguishing factor of the work of both companies and typifies their desire to empower their audiences. Because the moving of the 'out there' to the 'in here' via the visual cortex relies on the performer and Bud having a fluid, collaborative relationship built on clear communication pathways, it is necessary for the performer to understand the extent to which he is able to access visual stimuli. For example, Oily Cart uses video projection in its work, with audience members being encouraged to eye-track and recognise themselves projected onto a giant screen. For some of Bud's visually impaired peers, the size of the image may be key. Isabel Jones of Salamanda Tandem also uses video projection in her interactive art experience *The Living Room*. Jones writes:

²⁰ Anna Fenemore, 'The Pleasure of Objectification: A Spectator's Guide', *Performance Research*, 12 (2007), 4-13 (p. 8).

Many people with disabilities rarely experience their 'image' presented in a public space, and this type of close interaction with their own reflection, sounds and movement can be revelatory.... this is the first time they might feel a true connection with not only themselves, but also their environment.²¹

I would argue that this revelatory experience, in the context of Bud at the theatre, fulfills Bennett's definition of productive and emancipated spectatorship and is a technique Oily Cart uses repeatedly in its pieces. In *Moving Pictures* (2003), the company used live projection of the audience for the first time, and its effect on the participants was significant.²² Individuals become 'animated, engaged, involved' when seeing themselves projected on a large screen.²³

For those with hearing, the auditory sense is stimulated through the use of live and recorded music within the work of both companies. In all of their pieces, musicians move amongst the audience to encourage focus and the creation of mood. In *Blue* this involved a steel guitar and a double bass; in *Pool Piece*, a clarinet. Webb and Davies both use a range of drums in their work, stimulating both the auditory and the haptic. Sound systems built into the micro-theatre are able to emphasise the bass range, thus

²¹ Isabel Jones, 'Salamanda Tandem: The Living Room: Giving People with Disabilities a Safe Environment to Create and Explore', *Mailout Disability Arts*, <http://content.yudu.com/library/A1qn28/SalamandaTandemMailo/resources/index.htm> [accessed 1/8/12] (p. 24.)

²² Oily Cart, *25 Years*.

²³ Richard Burbage, Paddock School, interviewed for *Oily Cart 25 DVD*.

providing reverberation experiences for those people with hearing impairment; they can literally *feel* the music. In *Conference of the Birds*, moments of intense mood were created through the multi-layering of sound sources and in *Boing!* (2002) performers sang polyphonic, improvised songs with lyrics comprising the names of the audience member with whom they were bouncing on trampolines.²⁴

Both companies also use music or sound to mark the transitional moments of entering and leaving the performance space, thus helping to delineate Elam's moment of cognitive division or Counsell's brackets in time, which was identified as problematic for PMLD audiences in Chapter One. In Bamboozle's Leicestershire residencies (2000-2007) a flute played as the audience passed through a tunnel.²⁵ Its arrival in the space was accompanied by the recorded sound of horses' hooves on cobbles. In this case, the live music of the flute was replaced by the recorded sound, which marked the beginning of the performance within the inner frame.

Webb considers the kinaesthetic sense to be the most important sensory interactivity within the work of his company. He speaks very clearly about the importance of PMLD audience members 'being in their bodies' and creates pieces for Bud to experience whilst bouncing on a trampoline, swinging in a hammock, floating in the

²⁴ Oily Cart, *25 Years*.

²⁵ Bamboozle, *Multi-sensory Theatre*, 2007.

water, being rolled in a giant drum and flying in a leafy pod.²⁶ He writes:

Our theatre needed to involve the other senses, especially touch and smell, but also the kinaesthetic sense, the sense that the body has of its own movement in space. We needed to make a truly multi-sensory theatre. We investigated massage, aroma-therapy and hammocking – we would literally swing the participants in a hammock between two performers.²⁷

In *Something in the Air* (2010), Webb's most ambitious kinaesthetic piece, audience members, whilst seated in swinging chairs, were 'flown' to a height of two metres with moving aerialists flying around the space. The notion of stimulating Bud's awareness of his body in space is also an occasional feature of Davies' work with audience members bouncing on a giant bed and being moved round on a trolley during *Sensory Light and Magic*. The purpose of such an approach is to free the audience from the physical constraints of wheelchairs and splints, and to find stimulus through the alteration of gravitational sensation.

Through all these methods, Bamboozle's and Oily Cart's meticulously crafted and audience-centred approaches create a theatre experience that is a 'place of possibility rather than a

²⁶ Tim Webb, unpublished interview, Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, London. 13/12/2010

²⁷ Tim Webb, ASSITEJ, p. 198.

limitation', in Bennett's terms: although, as we have seen, these possibilities are likely to be very different for a PMLD audience.²⁸

Davies and Webb construct pieces through multi-sensory channels of highly differentiated and flexible stimuli. To access these pieces, the audience is encouraged to tune-in to specific moments, but need not follow the simple linear narratives presented to them. This is largely due the companies' awareness that there can be no guaranteed reliance on functional short and long-term memories with PMLD audiences. Suggesting that the use of the sensorium in embodying the immediacy of experience can move audiences away from reliance upon creating 'a picture in the head', Martin Welton writes:

I hope to suggest that not only can imagination employ and draw on the full range of human sensation, on our sensory relationships with the world, but also that the realm of imagination is as much one of immediate experience as it is of the distanced contemplation suggested by the picture-in-the-head model.²⁹

It is this primary concern with the immediacy of sense-experience described above which is the specialist and unique professional domain of Bamboozle and Oily Cart.

²⁸ Bennett, p. 115.

²⁹ Welton in Lepecki and Banes, p. 151.

Shortfall of Provision

Despite the expertise and experience behind the work of these companies, I would argue that their capacity to reach PMLD audiences remains constrained for a variety of reasons. Most fundamentally, both companies are small and only able to employ performing teams according to available funding, which is inconsistently awarded from a wide range of government and philanthropic sources. A feature of both companies' work is their use of residencies to develop knowledge of the unique cultural libraries of Bud and his peers. Although there are benefits in terms of the quality of communication between the audience members and performers as a result of this model, it also accrues significant financial costs thus impacting on the number of *performances* the companies can offer.

Bamboozle and Oily Cart exist independently from regional or national producing houses, further distancing them from consistent statutory funding streams provided by ACE. This perpetuates a sense of financial marginalisation. If specialist sensory theatre-making was accessed via regional producing theatres in receipt of statutory funding, Bud would be more likely to encounter it. However, because of the inequality of the consultation process, as outlined in my introductory chapter, this would still not be guaranteed. Bud relies on other people to request the provision on his behalf, and if those people are not aware that Bamboozle and Oily Cart exist, this perpetuates the notion that 'theatre is not for Bud.'

Despite anecdotal evidence being universally positive about the capacity of Davies' and Webb's work to engage PMLD audiences, formal measurement of its efficacy does not occur either within, or external to, the companies. Davies and Webb prefer to let the performances 'be what they are' without invasive feedback systems needing to be present which may change the nature of the performance.³⁰ In addition, both companies are reluctant to see their work as formulaic and thus replicable elsewhere. As Webb explains:

We get asked to systematise the work so others can do the work readily. But part of it is about being playful, observant, responsive. This doesn't fit easily into a place where containment and structure abounds.³¹

However, this 'not fitting' merely perpetuates a cycle of invisibility. Oily Cart's work is highly idiosyncratic: Webb states that 'we do what we do primarily because we enjoy it and we know it works'.³² This lack of theoretical under-pinning means that the work remains ill-defined, resistant to schematisation, and thus difficult to replicate. Without clear definition, its invisibility extends into the academic discourse where bodies of knowledge are created, extended and refined. Davies and Webb, despite being skilled and inspirational advocates for their work, and indeed, their audiences, choose to *make* theatre rather than *write* about it. Concomitantly, there is little

³⁰ Informal discussions carried out with Christopher Davies and Tim Webb between January and March 2009.

³¹ Interview with Webb, 13/12/2010

³² Interview with Webb, 13/12/2010

case-study material of sufficient muscularity to present to funding bodies. It is, indeed, a cyclical process of disempowerment for this form of theatre, and one this thesis seeks to address.

My examination of the shortfall up until this point has been concerned with capacity, funding and replicability. However, I believe there is also a fundamental shortfall in terms of the *content* offered by these companies, for neither creates work that engages audiences with emotionally-rich dramatic narratives. I believe that this perpetuates Bud's continued exclusion from theatre implied in the principles of Article 31.

Bamboozle's emphasis on long-term personal development, rather than on engagement in moments of emotionally-rich, narrative theatre, underpins the work of the company and Davies is not concerned with the development of audienceness *per se*. When attending a Bamboozle performance, Bud takes part in a multi-sensory experience, the key purpose of which is to stimulate tripodal and intense communication. A central tenet of the company's philosophy is that performers need to take as much time as necessary to connect with Bud, encouraging the development of his unique cultural library through a quiet, listening presence. Davies trains his performers to adhere to a practice of non-judgemental interactions, believing that key to Bud's development as a thinker, is the neutral but supportive presence of the people with him when he is doing the thinking. One of Davies' measures of success is

anecdotal, but unrecorded, evidence from teachers and companions of an improved sense of well-being and self-esteem which can be carried forward into the classroom and home settings. Although there may be emotionally rich moments resulting from the quality of the *connectedness* between Bud and the performers, there is little emphasis placed on emotional moments being built into the narrative itself.

When attending an Oily Cart performance, Bud takes part in a kinaesthetic, multi-sensory experience within which performers facilitate interactive episodes, and which is sometimes devoid of recognisable narrative. The company creates playful and joyful theatre but Webb does not place importance on the notion that the audience is experiencing 'a play', with its attendant emotional peaks and troughs. There *are* emotional moments within Webb's work but they tend to be triggered somatically, for their own sake, rather than serving a specific narrative purpose.

This examination of these companies has illustrated that the emphasis they place on immersive sensory interactivities within their work means that Bud continues to be denied access to emotional dramatic narratives. I would suggest that theatre for non-disabled audiences rarely offers narratives that are emotion-free and that Ubersfeld's 'pleasure of laughing and crying' is a key component of the art form. This omission from the work of these specialist theatre companies perpetuates Bud's disenfranchisement from partaking in

his cultural rights as stated in Article 31. In order to examine the means by which emotional dramatic narratives might be made accessible to Bud, I now examine my previous work as a classroom practitioner alongside the work of these two specialist companies, examining commonalities and contrasts.

The Three Spectra

As a teacher in a special needs classroom, I used multi-sensory interactivities to explore stories, often with an emotional strand to the narrative. In order to do this I utilised the three theatre spectra, developed by Dorothy Heathcote and defined here by Betty Jane Wagner:

Darkness – Light

Silence – Sound

Stillness - Action

For thousands of years the human family has been employing these spectra in the development of theater, in devising ways to affect an audience.³³

As I developed my work for this thesis, the process of reflecting on how I encouraged children to engage with narrative led me to believe that, within the process of teaching, I hierarchised light and sound along with the use of teacher-in-role to explore the action spectrum. This is not to say that the other senses were unimportant in my work,

³³ Betty Jane Wagner, *Dorothy Heathcote: Drama as a Learning Medium* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), p. 154.

but I would argue that they were less useful as foregrounding devices in the context of engagement with emotional narratives. This thesis thus considers how the notion of hierarchisation within classroom practice might be transposed into theatre-making environment, a notion explored fully in the *Thumbs Up* project which is discussed in Chapter Three.

Aston and Savona write of 'hierarchised system of signification' whereby the director orders images so that the audience focuses on the right thing at the right time, thus enabling plot and narrative to unfold as required by the script. They state that:

Signs operating within the theatrical frame need to be hierarchised in such a way as to help 'fix' meaning.³⁴

I suggest that the use of sound and light as the prioritised fixative agents may be key to enabling Bud's access to emotional narrative and that other sensory interactivities do not lead to such fixity. Generally speaking, when using the multi-sensory approach as typified by the work of Davies and Webb, the quality of engagement relies on the space being used 'centrifugally', with the performers working individually to facilitate interactivity between themselves, Bud and his companion.³⁵ I suggest that through hierarchising light, sound and action, the quality of engagement relies on the space being used 'centripetally', where Bud's focus, along with that of his

³⁴ Aston and Savona, p. 101.

³⁵ Patrice Pavis, *Analyzing Performance: theater, dance, and film*, trans. by David Williams (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2003), p. 153.

companion, is drawn towards the performer, or teacher.³⁶ This hierarchisation of light, sound and action within a multi-sensory approach is represented in Figure 2. This centripetal action then enables the development of a shared focus and thus a shared narrative, which I have argued, is key to enabling Bud's access to *emotional* narrative.

Davies and Webb tend not to have a hierarchy of senses within their work, recognising that individual members of the audience will access the piece according to their chosen, personalised, sensory needs. In addition to this non-hierarchical approach, they tend to use their performers as gatekeepers, facilitating and enabling audiences to access the sensory palette, rather than as enactors of a narrative requiring focus and attention. When I explored stories with young people, I worked primarily as a performer, not as a facilitator. Confined to a small classroom without stage lights or a sophisticated sound system, I actively sought ways of enabling the spectra to operate, through the use of window blinds, torches, song, recorded music and projected images. For example, a story about being lost in a forest would entail using a torch shining on wet leaves in a darkened room, a frantic rustling sound emerging from silence, and my working in role as a desperate parent in search of their lost child. In order to create moments of intense engagement within such

³⁶ Pavis, p. 153.

MULTI-SENSORY APPROACH

AESTHETICISED CLASSROOM

CENTRIPETAL FOCUS

CENTRIFUGAL FOCUS

SILENCE
SOUND
AUDITORY

DARKNESS
LIGHT
VISUAL

STILLNESS
ACTION
PRIMARILY
BY
ACTOR

SEE FIG 3

HAPTIC HUMAN TOUCH GUSTATORY OLFACTORY KINAESTHETIC

Figure 2
Hierarchising light, sound, and action within a multi-sensory approach

stories, I enhanced concentration and focus through sound, light and action, 'trapping the group into a particular moment'.³⁷ I felt that the manipulation of these spectra in various combinations had a significant effect on the capacity of the students to 'tune in' to emotional moments. Coming to this project, I believed that there were some relevancies here with regard to theatre-making for PMLD audiences and I was curious to explore how that entrapment in the moment might work for Bud.

The use of light, sound and action within stories transformed the classroom environment into a different reality. Dorothy Heathcote's praxis recognised the power of the spectra in enriching this '*as if*' construct, and encouraged the classroom practitioner to create the opportunity for culturally constructed 'felt human experience' to develop emotional literacy.³⁸ Extending Heathcote's thinking, I wanted to explore whether it might be possible for Bud to experience emotional spectatorship within theatre, and for him to learn about his own emotions by witnessing an actor *pretending* to experience those emotions. Such activity could, in effect, support the process of emancipating him as a spectator.

In addition to their capacity to move Bud into Schechner's 'there and then', the three spectra also exist as stand-alone sensory stimuli within a narrative. I would suggest that this is the way in

³⁷ Betty Jane Wagner, p. 158.

³⁸ Andy Kempe, 'Laughter in the Dark', in *Drama to Inspire*, ed. by John Coventon (Stoke on Trent: Trentham Books, 2011), p. 15.

which Davies and Webb use them, as part of their wider non-hierarchised multi-sensory approach. With regard to this, Mark Fortier poses a question which is key:

Do light, sound and movement always have a meaning? Isn't there a corporeality in theatre which is over and above the presentation of meaning?³⁹

In semiotic terms, the presence of the signifier could have a role in creating emotions within a theatre space, regardless of that which is being signified, and thus not require decoding to enable meaning to be made. In other words, *how* we tell the story might be as emotionally powerful as what the story is *about* if the audience cannot cognitively access the latter. With this in mind, the remainder of the chapter contains a theoretical exploration of each spectrum, with specific reference to this signifier/signified dyad, and identifies some practical implications of their usage that informed the next phase of the study.

Silence-Sound

Writing about the connection between feeling-states and music in the context of his research with non-PMLD people Oliver Sacks writes:

Music, uniquely among the arts, is both completely abstract and profoundly emotional. It has no power to represent anything particular or external, but it has a unique power to express

³⁹ Mark Fortier, *Theory/Theatre* (London: Routledge, 1977), p. 18.

inner states or feelings. Music can pierce the heart directly; it needs no mediation.⁴⁰

It seems logical to assume, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that this is also the case for Bud. In semiotic terms, as discussed earlier, music is both signifier and signified at the same time carrying no meaning other than itself, and so it is accessible to Bud as a conveyor of emotion. In addition to the power inherent within music to connect directly with the listeners' feelings, Sacks also suggests that the stirring of emotion through music need not be reliant on memory function:

The perception of music and the emotions it can stir is not solely dependent on memory, and music does not have to be familiar to exert its emotional power.⁴¹

Webb has concerns with the 'pictures in the head' model of theatre in relation to short-term memory loss, and so the power of music to stir emotion in the 'here and now' may be of importance to Bud and his peers. I was keen to explore the extent and intensity of the power alluded to by Sacks.

Throughout my work in schools I, along with colleagues, used music as a background wash to create general feeling states or set particular moods within the classroom; in this project, I was keen to explore the potential of shifting the emphasis from a generalised wash to a more foregrounded musical focus in enabling the creation

⁴⁰ Oliver Sacks, *Musophilia: Tales of Music and the Brain* (London: Picador, 2007), p. 329.

⁴¹ Sacks, p. 385.

of bold emotional landscapes.⁴² For example, it was commonplace within school for music of a calming nature to be played while the students entered the classroom in the morning. This music underscored various tasks of the students' own choosing, such as interacting with sensory toys, or working with a touch screen. My interest lay in how it might be possible for *background* music to become *foreground* music when a narrative moment within a theatre piece required that 'calm' be experienced by the audience.

Culturally and historically, the role of music within the theatre form has often been one of boundary demarcation, as discussed in the last chapter. Theodore Shanks notes that music has the indefinable capacity to 'charge the space, to define it with music at the beginning of the performance and, at the end, to defuse the space and return it to what it was'.⁴³ I was interested in examining the role of music in Bud's transitional moment of frame convergence and exploring how it might support him in creating a cognitive division between the real world and the imagined world.

Sound, beyond composed music, has a broader role in the wider auditory landscape of PMLD people. As Ockelford writes:

[music] may not be perceived as a distinct strand amid a welter of other sensory stimuli, and may not even be distinguished

⁴² Ockelford, p. 19.

⁴³ Theodore Shank, 'The Welfare State Theatre', *The Drama Review*, 21 (1977), 3-16 (p. 9)

from other forms of auditory input, such as speech and everyday noises.⁴⁴

Thus music was not the only way in which I wanted to explore the silence-sound spectrum in the context of Bud's access to theatre; I was also interested in sound effects and the spoken word. For example, soundscapes combining sound, music and speech could be an aural stimulus for Bud, with the component parts available for denotation or connotation by his non-disabled fellow audience members. Bud might react to the sound, intonation and rhythm of the words and the spaces, silences or blanks between them.

In addition to these explorations, I also wanted to consider further the ways in which Bamboozle and Oily Cart use music within their Intensive Interactions with the aim of creating a feeling of connectedness within the micro-theatre. I was interested to discover how this approach might be applied to working with the unique cultural library operating within the triadic relationship of Bud, his companion, and the performer within performance, and to support development of dramatic narrative that could be accessed by Bud.

Darkness-Light

Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton define the role of theatre lighting very simply, describing an audience as 'sit(ting) in darkness while the stage is lit in order to command their attention to the place

⁴⁴ Ockelford p. 40.

and action that matters'.⁴⁵ This quote is part of a larger, disparaging description of the *passive* participation expected of mainstream theatre audiences, and the complicit role played by signification systems in creating a fixed inner frame, safe from audience intervention. But it is exactly this fixedness of frame which I sought to explore in terms of its *emancipatory* potential for audiences without a 'history' of audienceness ; I perceived the ability of light to command attention as a desirable feature in the context of enabling Bud's emotional access. Prendergast and Saxton posit that the dominant cultural ideology is upheld by the signs within the inner frame in their disempowerment of the audience. I wanted to explore whether this could be an *empowering* construct for Bud in the way that it limits the visibly extraneous stimuli throughout a performance. As outlined above, Webb and Davies use light to encourage focus within their work, and acknowledge that Bud requires help when faced with the 'stage as a place of absolute scrutiny' in order to know which parts to scrutinise, and in which order, according to the needs of the narrative.⁴⁶ I thus wanted to explore the signifiatory power of the lit performance space as an emancipatory feature for Bud, enabling him to access the play through the foregrounding of objects and action within the visual field.

⁴⁵ *Applied Theatre: international case studies and challenges for practice*, ed. by Monica Prendergast and Juliana Saxton (Bristol: Intellect, 2009), p. 189.

⁴⁶ Pearson and Shanks, p. 23.

For audience members on the autistic spectrum, the dichotomous role of light, as outlined by Stanton B Garner, would require careful thought:

Light, [] is fictionalized and at the same time detheatricalized, in that its technological origins in the performance moment are placed "out of attention."⁴⁷

This is apposite because, as we have seen for autistic audiences, the *source* of the light is likely to hold greater fascination than the object or area being lit, causing a fixation on the signifier (detheatricalised light source) rather than the signified (fictionalised object of light) within performance. This distraction might cause Bud to ignore the performers and the dramatic action, whilst concentrating on the physiological stimulus of the light. Thus the potential of light to foreground moments of emotional intensity might be of less relevance to autistic audience members and I was keen to explore this dichotomy in practice.

Central to the notion of foregrounding is the capacity of the audience to focus on what I suspected were the primary producers of emotional meaning: the actors. Richard Pilbrow suggests 'that an actor who cannot be seen, cannot be heard'.⁴⁸ I was interested in how the transmission of emotion through an actor's voice and body could be supported through light. However Rita Jordan, in her work

⁴⁷ Stanton B. Garner, 'Sensing Realism: Illusionism, Actuality and the Theatrical Sensorium', in Lepecki and Banes, p. 117.

⁴⁸ Richard Pilbrow, *Stage Lighting* (New York: Drama Book Specialists, 1970), p. 14.

with autistic young people, suggests that to see and hear someone at the same time might cause sensory over-arousal, resulting in behaviour such as closing their eyes, or looking at a blank wall, whilst someone is talking to them.⁴⁹ Perhaps it might be the case for some PMLD audience members that their *hearing* (and thus potential for understanding) would be enhanced if the added visual stimulus of the *sight* of the actor's face was taken away. It would be one less stimulus to process if the actors worked in darkness. This is especially the case if the person has a sensory modulation disorder lessening their ability to process and organise their reactions to sensory stimuli. In these cases it could be that a single stimulus may be preferable to polysemicity as it creates less sensory saturation.

Colour also plays a part in the darkness-light spectrum and Patrice Pavis writes of its effect on state of mind:

Spectators are sensitive to the colours used: warm hues for a pleasant sensation; cold ones to produce feelings of sadness; middling tones to create a neutral, calm impression.⁵⁰

This clearly indicates the inherent power of light to elicit emotion within theatre, and I was eager to explore the compositional range of light, including the role of colour, within the performing space. As described in Chapter Three, the capacity of colour to create focus and mood would inform decisions not only about the use of light within the narrative, but also the colour of the micro-theatre itself.

⁴⁹ Rita Jordan, *Autism with Severe Learning Difficulties* (London: Souvenir Press, 2001), p. 148.

⁵⁰ Pavis, p. 192.

There were some significant and fundamental sensitivities to take into consideration when using light with Bud and his peers throughout the practical phase of this research. Light is a physiologically powerful sensory stimulus capable of triggering strong, and sometimes unwanted, neurological reactions. In photosensitive epilepsy, seizures are triggered by certain rates of flashing lights or contrasting light and dark patterns.⁵¹ Investigations with light would thus need careful handling in order that such unwanted reactions did not overshadow its more latent, subtle power as a convention to create mood and feelings.

Stillness-Action

Aristotle defines action as being key to an audience's understanding of content. Speaking about the tragic form he writes: 'It is drama (that is, it shows people performing actions) and not narration'.⁵² Whilst Aristotle is writing in the context of classical theatre, I would argue that his terms are still relevant to the exploration here of the stillness-action spectrum in the contemporary context of my work. The Aristotelian view of action is of particular interest in Bud's case. Specifically, the notion that access to understanding lies with mimesis, not diegesis, as the former supports audiences for whom cognitive understanding of language is challenging. The opportunity

⁵¹ Epilepsy Society, <http://epilepsysociety.org.uk/about-epilepsy/what-is-epilepsy/triggers/photosensitiveepilepsy> [Accessed July 12]

⁵² Aristotle, *The Poetics*, trans. by Kenneth McLeish (London: Nick Hern Books, 1998), p. 9.

to see action, without the need to hear narration, is obviously of benefit to hearing-impaired PMLD audience members. For PMLD audiences with visual impairment, use of additional diegetic or narrative channels would seem a logical inclusion. However, as a result of limited cognitive function this would still not guarantee understanding as it is predicated on the processing of language to create meaning.

Thus I would posit that a third channel of dramatic discourse, uncharted by Aristotle, is that of aisthesis, which utilises the body as 'a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation'.⁵³ I was interested in exploring this triad throughout the practical phase as my belief was that the 'doing' (or aesthetic) not only led to *understanding* but also formed a common access point for all people, whether in the classroom or within a performance. Everyone is able to access *the* world, or *a* world, somatically: indeed, this is at the core of Bamboozle and Oily Cart's practice. In this research project, I too was striving to make theatre within which access points were provided for all.

Wagner's definition of the spectra earlier in this chapter limits stillness-action to the way in which physical, or mimetic, action supports *symbolic* meaning, a concept largely unattainable for Bud and his peers. Heathcote's rationale for doing so is as follows:

⁵³ Richard Shusterman, 'Thinking Through the Body, Educating for the Humanities: A Plea for Somaesthetics', *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 40 (2006), 1, 1-21 (p. 2).

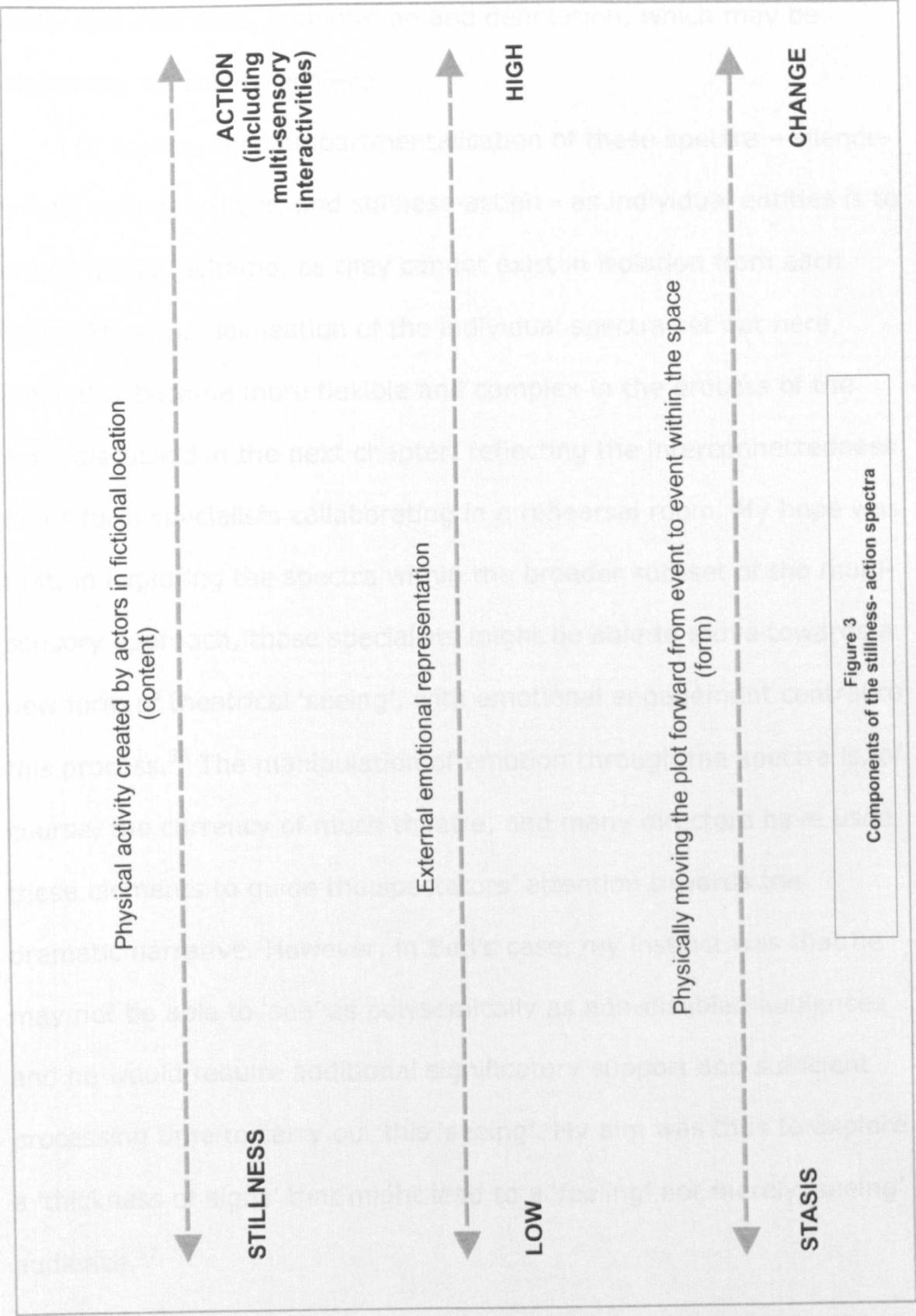
We interpret the doing things much more than the saying things, because as children all of us have depended for survival on reading non-verbal signals rather than listening to what someone is saying.⁵⁴

This assumes that there is the capacity in place for such interpretation, which may not be the case for PMLD audiences, many of whom may remain at the pre-language stage of development. I would add that there are additional stillnesses and actions, not covered by Heathcote, which may impact on Bud, including emotional stillness and emotional intensity, and the evolution of the plot as it unfolds through events from states of stasis to states of change. Thus, for the purposes of the practical exploration ahead, I defined this particular spectrum as threefold: a scale of physical activity created by the actors within the fictional location (including the sensory interaction), the external representation of emotion by them, and activities demanded by the plot in order to move from event to event which they have to enable.⁵⁵ This threefold schema of the spectrum is represented in Figure 3.

In the context of this research, all three of these applications of the stillness-action spectrum are limited to the *external* representation of action. This is because anything that is *internal* is, by definition, invisible and relies on the capacity of the audience to extract meaning. I believe that this internality demands a degree of

⁵⁴ Betty Jane Wagner, p. 161.

⁵⁵ See Chapter Six for full description of the term 'event'.



motivated inference, connotation and denotation, which may be impossible for Bud to achieve.

Of course, the compartmentalisation of these spectra – silence-sound, darkness-light, and stillness-action - as individual entities is to create a false schema, as they cannot exist in isolation from each other. Thus the delineation of the individual spectra set out here, inevitably became more flexible and complex in the process of the work discussed in the next chapter, reflecting the interconnectedness of art form specialists collaborating in a rehearsal room. My hope was that, in exploring the spectra within the broader sub-set of the multi-sensory approach, those specialists might be able to move towards a new form of theatrical 'seeing', with emotional engagement central to this process.⁵⁶ The manipulation of emotion through the spectra is, of course, the currency of much theatre, and many directors have used these elements to guide the spectators' attention towards the dramatic narrative. However, in Bud's case, my instinct was that he may not be able to 'see' as polysemically as non-disabled audiences and he would require additional signifiatory support and sufficient processing time to carry out this 'seeing'. My aim was thus to explore a 'thickness of signs' that might lead to a 'feeling' not merely 'seeing' audience.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Aston and Savona, p. 7.

⁵⁷ Roland Barthes, *Critical Essays*, trans. by Richard Howard (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 1972), p. 262.

Building a Theatre Space

That 'feeling' must of course take place in a particular space and, having considered the work of the two specialist companies introduced at the outset of this chapter, I felt that making a micro-theatre space within which I could experiment was key. Schechner writes that the 'use of space is fundamentally *collaborative*.... The design encourages participation; it is also a reflection of the wish for participation'.⁵⁸ Thus I believed that a custom-built space would set the context for a series of collaborations.

At the outset of the collaborative research phase, I drew on Pavis's performance analysis of the spatial experience of the spectator, in which he puts forward two seemingly antithetical concepts. The first is that space is conceived 'as an empty space to be filled, as [] an environment that has to be controlled, filled and made expressive'. The second is that space is conceived as 'invisible, unlimited and linked to its users, determined by their co-ordinates, movements and trajectory'.⁵⁹ In the context of Bud as a member of an audience, these concepts are in fact, inextricably linked: I wanted to explore the ways that a space, having been made fully expressive through selected, designed features, could also be linked to its users through the sensorium. I felt that the space did not need to be empty to enable connectivity, rather it needed to be fully crafted and demarcated through specific design choices, which would focus and

⁵⁸ Richard Schechner, *Environmental Theater* (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1973), p. 39.

⁵⁹ Pavis, p. 150.

contain the concentration of an audience inexperienced in the cultural construct of theatre.

An 'expanded and extended' space might be illegible to Bud, who, as we have seen, is likely to need clear and strong signposting to enable him to access theatre, a form with which he has not yet attained cultural competence. The notion of expansion and extension suggests a lack of delineation and definition. Far from restricting the audience, by moving within the territories of both centrifugal space (the performer reaching out, as with the multi-sensory approach) and centripetal space (drawing audience focus towards an area of the stage, as with the three spectra approach), we could evolve new semiotic approaches specific to Bud and his peers, based on a space full of possibility and flexibility. I wanted to explore the idea of flexible proxemics with their capacity for intra-audience communication pathways, as practised by Davies and Webb, *alongside* hierarchised signification through the three spectra, to foreground emotional narrative. The first practical research phase, *Thumbs Up*, was thus designed to trial highly crafted moments of theatre, utilising the three spectra, alongside the haptic, flexible audience-centric multi-sensory approach in order to do so.

In this chapter, I have considered the work of two theatre companies who work with PMLD audiences. The longevity of, and continued demand upon, these companies is evidence of their success in engaging such young people through meticulous

preparation of their flexible, multi-sensory pieces with audience reception at their core. They achieve this through iterative practice, use of micro-theatre spaces and non-hierarchised use of sensory pathways enabling performers to work centrifugally within the space. I suggested that their size and independence from regional producing houses make them unlikely to impact significantly and sustainably on the attainment of the values underpinning Article 31. I then suggested that the emphasis on the multi-sensory approach denies access to fictional narratives with the concomitant potential for emotional engagement which typifies theatre for non-disabled audiences. Putting forward the notion that the three spectra as foregrounding devices might begin to address this cultural shortfall, I concluded with an examination of the micro-theatre as a starting point for collaborative practice, within which combinations of signification could be explored. With this in mind, the next chapter looks at the *Thumbs Up* phase of practical research, which tested out the potential for the three spectra to foreground emotional narratives in collaboration with a production team at Nottingham Playhouse, a regional producing house.

Chapter Three

Thumbs Up

Exploring the three spectra, within a micro-theatre context, to foreground moments of emotional narrative for PMLD audiences.

Jasmine arrives at the entrance to a large classroom. Inside it is a tent-like inner room. She and her companion are invited to come inside to join her classmates and their companions.

Jasmine:

There are lots of people in here that I don't know. There are loads of wires coming out of the back of that computer, snaking up the pole. They disappear into the back of those lights somewhere. *She walks over to the lights and reaches up towards them.*

Lesley:

Come on Jas. Don't touch love. Where should we sit?

Jasmine takes herself to a beanbag. She is given a tray of sand in which are hidden a number of sea-related objects. As Lesley rubs some sun cream into her arm, a smell of water-melon is released. Jasmine looks interested, so Lesley places a dab of cream on both of their noses.

Jasmine:

This must be a sensory story. We have those in our classroom on Friday mornings. Why are we doing it in a tent on a Wednesday afternoon?

Jasmine becomes aware of a deep rumbling, close to her back, coming from a hidden speaker behind her beanbag. She leans into it as it becomes the sound of waves breaking on pebbles. She raises her hand to her face. Her skin is lit with the effect of blue rippling water. She looks at Lesley, who has the lighting effect on her face. Jasmine laughs and laughs.

Following on from the cultural shortfall outlined previously, Chapter Three describes the *Thumbs Up* phase of the research which tested out the potential for the three spectra to engage PMLD audiences in emotional narrative. Through a consideration of this initial practice as research phase, this chapter examines whether the spectra can function as signposts to the audience, as suggested in Chapters One and Two. Beginning with the research methodology, I go on to outline the *Thumbs Up* process, describing how through an iterative cycle of collaboration hosted and produced by Nottingham Playhouse, we created two pilot theatre pieces, *Tree* and *Harry*, which were taken to Oak Field School and performed to PMLD audiences. In the light of the analysis that follows, I outline what these pieces offered these audiences, and what issues were identified as needing further consideration, in order to take forward some general principles in

preparation for the final practical phase of this collaborative research project.

Overall Research Design

Just as there was fundamental tension with labelling Lily as learning-disabled, there was also tension around the notion of observing her as a subject of research. The positioning of this work within the social model of disability required methodologies that included, rather than marginalised, Lily, and the notion of her being a subject of research, separate from the researcher, suggests an undesirable degree of distance and objectivity. Working alongside Lily required an avoidance of the marginalisation experienced in other areas of her life. Therefore, the research design for both of the practical research phases needed to ensure as empowering a process as possible that was about *Lily's* experience, as audience member, not mine as researcher. Lily's life is subject to scrutiny from multiple agencies, and requires a researcher to exhibit sensitive behaviour, working with what Colette Conroy terms 'deep empathy and intimate dialogue' towards a common purpose. Working alongside a collaborator embodies potential for change.¹

Thus the most important over-arching feature of the research design was that it should be emancipatory in nature. Such emancipatory research attempts to redress the imbalance of power

¹ Colette Conroy, 'Disability: Creative tensions between drama, theatre and disability arts', *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 14 (2009), 1 (p. 7).

between researchers and the researched, and is commonly used with disenfranchised and disempowered groups of people.² This approach aims to place the responsibility for systemic change *away* from the researched group and positions it within the socio-political structures causing the disenfranchisement. This aligns well both with the social model of disability, and the legislative shortfalls for learning disabled audiences, specifically Article 31 and ACE provision, which I discussed in my introduction. Defining the potential power of emancipatory research, Jill Porter and Penny Lacey write:

Emancipatory research focuses on changing the social relations of research production, thus changing the power relations between the researcher and the researched, and providing a meaningful influence on policy.³

Having decided that this approach would be key to my work with Lily, I then positioned it within a participatory action research paradigm. This inclusive approach has collaboration and change agency as its main features and was thus appropriate to further the core aims of this study. Mark Fox, Peter Martin and Gill Green summarise why this is the case:

Action research paradigms are a means by which the practitioner researcher acknowledges and uses the power contained within the research process to facilitate change.⁴

² Mark Fox, Peter Martin and Gill Green, *Doing Practitioner Research* (London: Sage, 2007)

³ Jill Porter and Penny Lacey, *Researching Learning Difficulties* (London: Sage, 2005), p. 33.

⁴ Fox, Martin and Green. P. 48.

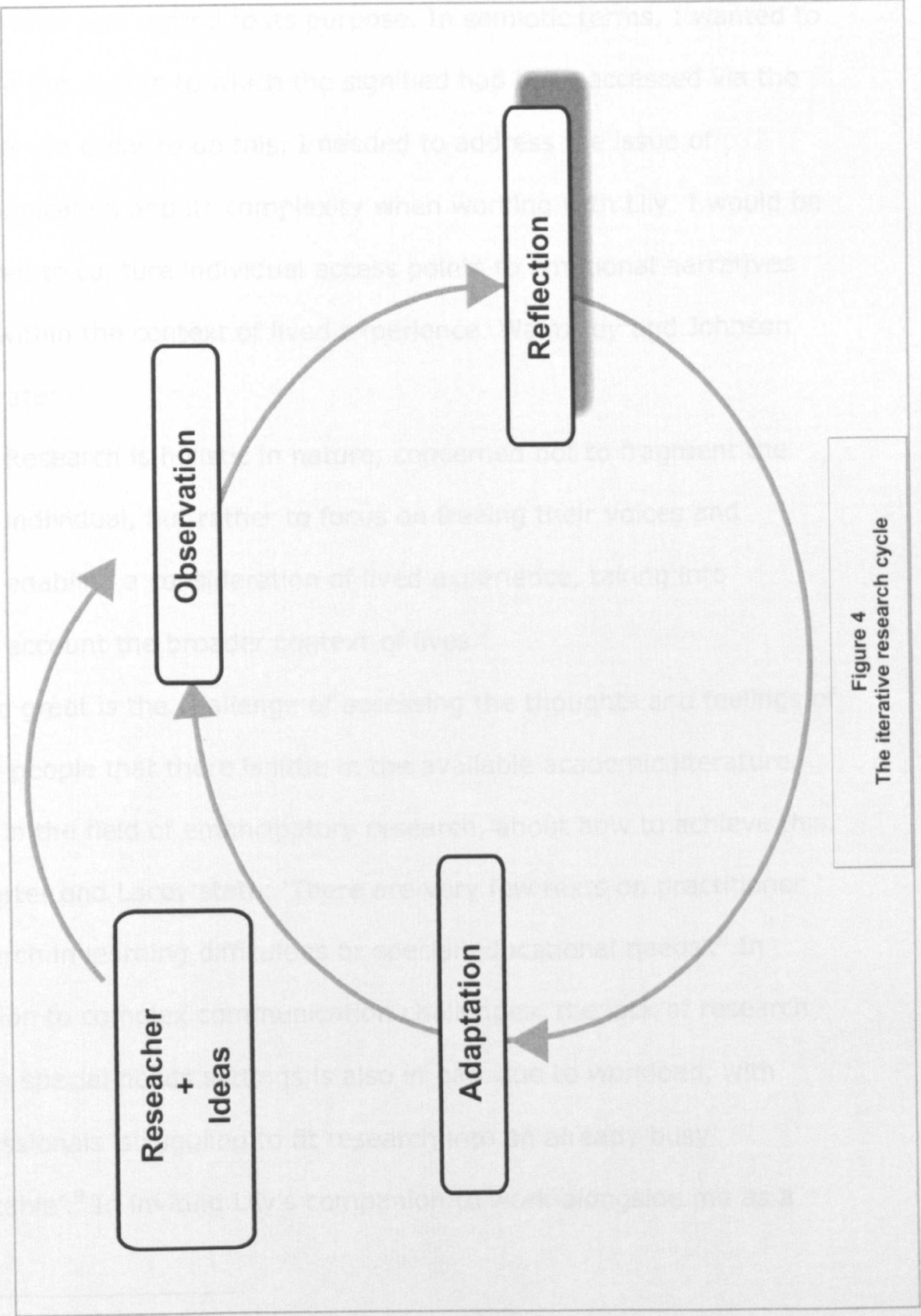
The placing of the researcher as change-agent was particularly useful during the *Thumbs Up* phase of the research which had a collaborative cycle of observation, reflection and adaptation at its core and within which the empowerment of both the research team and the young people in schools was key. This collaborative cycle of iterative research is illustrated in Figure 4.

As with all participatory action research studies, it was small-scale and qualitative in nature, rooted in the direct experience of individual lives. Working with small numbers of young people enabled me to observe personalised 'variegated' responses and allowed flexibility with regard to the complex heterogeneity operating within the audience member/companion/performer triad.⁵ This approach acknowledged difference and variability and was well suited to working in the rehearsal studio, the classroom, and the micro-theatre that were the settings of the study. Jan Walmsley and Kelly Johnson support this choice of methodology and explain that:

Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving a naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them.⁶

⁵ John, M Davis, 'Understanding the meanings of children: a reflexive process' *Children & Society*, 12 (1998), p. 327.

⁶ Jan Walmsley and Kelley Johnson, *Inclusive Research with People with Learning Disabilities: past, present and futures* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2003), p. 25.



The use of the word 'meanings' in the above quote is apposite in the context of this study, as the extent to which meanings had been *understood* was central to its purpose. In semiotic terms, I wanted to explore the degree to which the signified had been accessed via the signifier. In order to do this, I needed to address the issue of communication and its complexity when working with Lily. I would be required to capture individual access points to emotional narratives from within the context of lived experience. Walmsley and Johnson elaborate:

Research is holistic in nature, concerned not to fragment the individual, but rather to focus on freeing their voices and enabling a consideration of lived experience, taking into account the broader context of lives.⁷

But so great is the challenge of accessing the thoughts and feelings of PMLD people that there is little in the available academic literature, even in the field of emancipatory research, about how to achieve this. As Porter and Lacey state: 'There are very few texts on practitioner research in learning difficulties or special educational needs'.⁸ In addition to complex communication challenges, the lack of research within special needs settings is also in part due to workload, with professionals 'struggling to fit research into an already busy timetable'.⁹ In inviting Lily's companion to work alongside me as a

⁷ Walmsley and Johnson, p. 41.

⁸ Porter and Lacey, p. 116.

⁹ Porter and Lacey, p. 116.

co-researcher, I needed to be mindful of the numerous other demands on her time and energy.

However, in order to facilitate and record Lily's access to theatre, despite the methodological barriers, it was crucial that I *found* ways of understanding when and why her 'I get it' moments were taking place. There were three specific types of communication challenge informing the practical phases of the study that needed addressing in order for me to gather an accurate record of engagement and its catalysts.

Firstly, I needed to differentiate between Lily's intentional and unintentional communicative acts in order to record which behaviours were in response to specific foregrounded emotional moments. For example, Lily often made a 'cooing' noise to herself without necessarily reacting to an obvious external stimulus. I needed to be able to tell if the 'coo' was in reaction to the work we were doing with her.

Secondly, there needed to be an awareness of possible inconsistencies in ways of communicating and the effect this may have on data. I believe there were two potential areas of inconsistency of interpretation in the context of my research. An example of the first would be that Lily sometimes reacted to water on her face by standing still, and sometimes by running away. Both may be examples of engagement, and evidence that the use of water within the piece provided her with an 'I get it' moment.

Finally (and the area upon which the efficacy of the first two factors depended) there was the need for companions to interpret and infer meaning from her behaviour. In addition to this, I was alert to the potential for inaccuracy if two companions interpreted behaviour differently. Therefore it was essential that the same companion remained with Lily for as much of the process as possible. The companion, alongside me, would be interpreting the 'cooing', both in terms of its trigger (the signifier) and its meaning (the signified). Remaining mindful of these three challenges enabled me to look at theatre in the context of the individual person, and not the other way round.

Concerns about hearing Lily's voice accurately are closely linked with the notion of reflexivity in terms of the impact that my world would have on her world and *vice versa*. I was aware that my relationship with the young people and their companions would bring about new understandings created as a result of our presence in each other's worlds. Alan Dyson argues that researchers need to 'become reflexive in their awareness of how they are enmeshed in these processes, for them to struggle against the undue exercise of power': the chosen research methodology needed to support this enmeshment, crucially enabling me to encompass the triadic inter-subjectivities present throughout.¹⁰

¹⁰ Alan Dyson, Mei Lin and Alan Millward, *Effective Communication Between Schools, LEAs and Health and Social Services in the Field of Special Educational Needs* (London: DfEE, 1998), p. 3.

Key to this notion was creating a research design not reliant on triangulation to validate its conclusions. Used extensively within educational research to add rigour to a qualitative research design, triangulation gathers accounts from three different viewpoints within the same situation. However, Lily could not be part of the 'triangle' because she was, and remains, pre-verbal. The involvement of three people in observing Lily's behaviour exemplifies the opposite of what I wanted to achieve in terms of her specific and unique experience. The fewer people involved in interpretation/observation, the more empowered and accurate the data would be. Writing about this in the context of researching alongside learning-disabled people, Walmsley and Johnson further articulate why this is the case:

There is a commitment to taking people's words seriously, to believing them as credible respondents with their own understandings, without a need for triangulation or other checks.¹¹

However, I challenge the stance above in its use of the word 'words'. Despite Walmsley and Johnson's acknowledgement of the need for Lily's understandings to be a creditable source of data, they do not take into account the fact that she is pre-verbal. This further emphasises the important role of the companion in advocating on Lily's behalf. Within my practical research phase, it was vital to acknowledge that Lily's companion was not *validating* Lily's response,

¹¹ Walmsley and Johnson, p. 41.

as is the case with a triangulation approach, but was articulating and clarifying it.

Across both phases of the practical research, I used a range of data-gathering methods in order to be reactive amidst specific people and situations although, as a reflective feature, I kept a field journal throughout. This breadth of methodologies characterises participatory action research and I will outline the specific techniques as the following chapters unfold.

Thumbs Up

The *Thumbs Up* phase was produced and hosted by Roundabout Education at Nottingham Playhouse, a regional producing house. The project was an opportunity to create an experimental training ground for a team of practitioners eager to discover more about the value of this approach for PMLD audiences. I worked collaboratively with a theatre designer (micro-theatre), musician (silence-sound), videographer (darkness-light), and a story-teller/actor (stillness-action) in order to explore the question: how can the three spectra, and their combinations, working within a micro-theatre context, be used to foreground moments of emotional narrative for Lily and her peers? *Thumbs Up* took place over a three week period in 2010 and the process was divided into three parts: preparation, work in school, and reflection. Our explorations were captured in the form of

practitioner notebooks and the proto-plays we created. Figure 5 summarises the process and the data-gathering methods.

Although the work built on the detailed analysis of the three spectra contained in Chapter Two, I did not feel it was appropriate to work painstakingly and systematically through each spectrum, analysing and deconstructing their effects on PMLD audiences. This reductionism would have been counter-intuitive to the spirit of collaboration and creativity. The spectra were general principles or 'holding devices' from which our discussions wandered and then returned. Most usefully the spectra provided a democratic structure for the arts practitioners, each of whom found a creative home somewhere on these spectra. They presented us with a common lexicon to which we could refer as a team, rather like an artist's palette, providing the raw material for the theatre-making process. The spectra brought a welcome degree of schematisation, whilst recognising that within theatre 'Meaning is generated relentlessly: performance is a saturated space'.¹²

¹² Pearson and Shanks, p. 28.

Research question: how can the three spectra & their combinations be used to foreground moments of emotional narrative ?		
Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
Preparation: Nottingham Playhouse	Working in school	Reflection: Nottingham Playhouse
Practitioner explorations of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CREATIVE FRAMEWORK ACADEMIC FRAMEWORK EDUCATIONAL FRAMEWORK THE TWO PROTO-PLAYS HARRY TREE	Residency at: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> OAKFIELD SCHOOL <p>Engagement in emotional moments recorded in field journal/practitioner notebooks. Additional feedback gathered from teachers and companions</p>	Practitioner reflections on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> MICRO -THEATRE SILENCE-SOUND DARKNESS-LIGHT STILLNESS-ACTION Reflective feedback given via model of micro-theatre, video, musical composition & taxonomy for actors.
PARTICIPATORY	ACTION	RESEARCH
PRACTITIONER	NOTEBOOKS	FIELD JOURNAL

Figure 5
Summary of the *Thumbs Up* phase

Writing about the role of signification systems within theatre, Roger Scruton states that they are there to help the audience 'feel the right emotion, on the right occasion, toward the right object and in the right degree'.¹³ Thus, armed with some understanding of these signification systems from the viewpoint of our individual art forms, we began work as a practitioner team.

Preparation

As outlined in Figure 4, the team worked at Nottingham Playhouse within three frameworks: creative, academic and educational, enabling us to consider the multiple contexts informing *Thumbs Up*. Exploring the creative framework, we considered the three spectra as part of the multi-sensory approach and explored how the presence of 'wash', a term borrowed from fine art, could act as a base from which foregrounding could occur. Exploratory work around the academic framework examined three key concepts: Bennett's understanding of outer and inner frames, the horizon of expectations and the reality/fiction dyad. The educational framework considered the QCA (Qualification and Curriculum Authority) documents used in Special Schools; *Planning, Teaching and Assessing the Curriculum for Pupils with Learning Difficulties*, along with some practical exploration of Intensive Interaction techniques based on the work of Cauldwell.¹⁴

¹³ Roger Scruton, *The Aesthetic Understanding: Essays in the Philosophy of Art and Culture* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1983), p. 141.

¹⁴ Qualifications and Curriculum Development Agency, <http://www.qcda.gov.uk/1840.aspx>. Accessed 16/6/09

Central to this preparation phase was the creation of a research ethos within the team, all of whom had a specific interest in working in PMLD contexts, but no previous experience of a participatory action research process. We explored the importance of placing the artist at the core of this iterative process and how, by Dyson's definition, they could become 'enmeshed in the processes' of research, not separate from them.¹⁵ We also reflected on how performers are natural analysts, drawing on instincts to 'read' the audience in order to adapt the next performance and how this is, by its very nature, a basic iterative research cycle.

A range of books, publications, articles and DVDs created by a variety of practitioners ignited this exploration, examined through group discussion and practical workshopping.¹⁶ Throughout preparation week the team members were encouraged to keep notebooks and it is with reference to these documents that I record here the process we experienced. Despite clear planning, I had no pre-conceived *outcomes* regarding the nature of what specialist art form practitioners could offer Lily, and I hoped that an atmosphere of open debate, based on all contributions being valued equally, would nurture productive and enjoyable discourse.

Phoebe Caldwell, *Finding You Finding Me* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2006).

¹⁵ Dyson, Lin and Millward, p. 5.

¹⁶ These included: Oily Cart, *25 Years*, (in-house publication on DVD, 2008).

Canterbury Childrens Centre, Bradford, *Movement Matters; Dance Movement Residency: A Film*, (in-house publication on DVD, 2002)

Richard Aylwin, *Through Listening Eyes: an Intimate Witness to Creativity* (Welsh National Opera, on DVD, 2002)

Phoebe Caldwell and Jane Horwood, *From Isolation to Intimacy: Making Friends without Words* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2007).

Alongside exploring these frameworks, time was spent developing new theatre pieces to be taken into school, enabling the team to explore practically the theoretical scaffolding under construction. Through workshopping, devising and improvisation, we developed two new pieces which, between them, covered a broad emotional landscape for our audiences. This landscape would invite engagement, enabling us to observe the degree to which audiences chose to be involved and how that involvement manifested itself. After looking at visual images and simple stories in a range of fiction books, two performances were devised: *Harry* and *Tree*. *Harry* was inspired by a book called *Oscar and Hoo* by Theo.¹⁷ This story, about a boy getting lost, combined the themes of 'holidays', 'the sea' and 'family' which our host school had informed us were topics for the term. The mood of the piece was upbeat, optimistic and with a sense of purpose but the simple narrative was suffused with undercurrents of anxiety. Although the central character was ten-year old Harry, the story was told through the character of his mother and it was through her that the audience would experience the process of packing for the holiday, travelling, arriving, losing Harry and being reunited. The style of the piece was somewhat 'quirky' using projected stick-figures, comedy and high energy performance.

¹⁷ Theo, *Oscar and Hoo*, (London: Harper Collins, 2002).

The second piece, called *Tree*, was inspired by a version of the Robin Hood fable written by Kevin Crossley-Holland.¹⁸ We used the first page of the book as a springboard for our devising, with a central character finding a piece of treasure at the foot of a tree, thus linking that person with the past. The performance encompassed 'ourselves' and 'myths', which again were themes on which the schools would be basing their learning and teaching. The central protagonist in our devised piece was an adolescent girl called Rachel who has a tree in her garden that gets blown down in a storm. Having sheltered in a den, she emerges to find a box under the tree full of artefacts from her babyhood. The mood at the outset of the piece was calm and contemplative. This beginning was then contrasted with the chaos of the storm, and followed by the sadness of the fallen tree. There was a sense of optimism and peace at the end. The feeling-states within *Tree* were designed to contrast with those experienced in *Harry*, and together presented a series of emotional moments linking clear narratives. The contrasting performing styles of each piece were of interest to me with regard to any observable difference they made in engaging the audience. Both pieces had a simple dramatic narrative broken down into a series of emotionally intense moments but they differed in their underlying mood and performance style. The learning to come out of this process would be taken forward to the creation of the next phase of

¹⁸ Kevin Crossley-Holland, *British Folk Tales: New versions*, (London: Orchard Books, London, 1987).

the project and inform the making of *White Peacock*. An account of these two pieces and how they worked in the school setting can be found later in this chapter. Full working scripts of both pieces are included in Appendix 2 of this thesis.

'Everyvoice'

The purpose of making these two pieces was to look at the three spectra and their capacity to foreground emotional narrative. Central to our preparation was the development of a tone of voice for performance purposes which was not patronising, and which was pitched appropriately to the chronological, rather than cognitive, age of the audience. I coined the term 'everyvoice' and encouraged the practitioners to adopt a tone that could be used universally with all young adults, whether or not they were learning disabled. This ensured that we would be able to communicate appropriately with diverse audiences to minimise polarity. Despite the seeming contradiction here with the emphasis I have placed on individual communication pathways for PMLD audiences, I believed that the tone of voice taken to enable the choice of pathways needed to be universally appropriate in order to avoid patronising the listener.

Oak Field School

Having explored the frameworks, visited the school and devised performance material, the team was ready for the experimental work

alongside PMLD students. Oak Field School (formerly The Shepherd) is a school in Nottingham for 106 children and young people aged 3-19 with severe and profound learning disabilities. The team worked with four groups of students across Key Stages 3 and 4, spending two days with each group. *Harry* was performed on Day 1 and *Tree* on Day 2. There were five students, plus companions, within the micro-theatre at each performance.

The rhythm of work at Oak Field was conducive to iteration and collaborative development, with each afternoon spent as a team, discussing issues that had arisen in the morning and looking for ways to improve emotional access for the audience. Thus, feedback from practitioners and teachers would directly inform the next day's work through a process of discussing the stimuli offered and analysing the resulting observations. For example, we projected images onto a white surface, discussed the engagements we had observed, tried the same images projected onto a black surface, and repeated the reflective process. I gathered general feedback from teachers, teaching assistants and other observers at the earliest opportunity following each performance, in order to access an immediate response.

In order to keep an iterative ethos to the research, we pooled ideas as a creative team, planned either individually or collaboratively how to realise them, reflected on their capacity to engage, and repeated the process the following day. We carefully added elements

of the spectra operating within the performances as time progressed in order to acclimatise the audiences to increasing intensity of signification. We called these Levels 1, 2 and 3. In order to illustrate this incremental development of signification levels, I include extracts from both scripts, below.

The first extract is from *Harry* and is the moment when Mum discovers that her son is lost. The purpose of the three spectra here was to foreground a feeling of anxiety for the audience. Level 1 uses the stillness-action and silence-sound spectra (sound effects only). Level 2 adds music and Level 3 adds the darkness-light spectra.

HARRY IS LOST: Level 1

MUM:

Where's Harry?
Where's my son, Harry?
Harry? Harry? Harry?
Harry!
HARRY!

GB reinforces to the audience that Harry is all alone, and his Mum is worried. She uses the sea drum to create the sound of waves

HARRY IS LOST: Level 2

MUM:

Where's Harry?
Where's my son, Harry?
Harry? Harry? Harry?
Harry!
HARRY!

LONELY MUSIC (WITH CLARINET)

GB reinforces to the audience that Harry is all alone, and his Mum is worried. She uses the sea drum to create the sound of waves

HARRY IS LOST: Level 3

MUM:

Where's Harry?
Where's my son, Harry?
Harry? Harry? Harry?
Harry!
HARRY!

LONELY MUSIC (WITH CLARINET)

GB reinforces to the audience that Harry is all alone, and his Mum is worried. She uses the sea drum to create the sound of waves

VIDEO: STICK FIGURE AND FACIAL EXPRESSIONS SEQUENCE

The second extract is from *Tree* and illustrates the moment when Rachel discovers that her tree has fallen down. The purpose of the three spectra here was to foreground the emotion of sadness for the audience. Level 1 uses the stillness-action and silence-sound spectra (sound effects and music). Level 2 adds the darkness-light spectrum with Level 3 using all three spectra with the addition of a more complex musical arrangement and the sound of a character crying.

FALLEN TREE: Level 1

GB asks audience to turn to face away from the den, towards where the tree has been left, lying on its side. Rachel discovers the fallen tree by removing the cloth. Dialogue is accompanied by sound of Rachel cracking twigs.

My tree!
Cracked, broken, snapped, twisted, crunched, smashed, damaged, dead.
My tree.
My poor tree.

Rachel stays with the tree while devastation music plays.

DEVASTATION MUSIC (SIMPLE VERSION).

FALLEN TREE: Level 2

GB asks audience to turn to face away from the den, towards where the tree has been left, lying on its side. Rachel discovers the fallen tree by removing the cloth. Dialogue is accompanied by sound of Rachel cracking twigs.

My tree!
Cracked, broken, snapped, twisted, crunched, smashed, damaged, dead.
My tree.
My poor tree.

Rachel stays with the tree while devastation music plays.

DEVASTATION MUSIC (SIMPLE VERSION).

VIDEO: TWILIGHT

FALLEN TREE: Level 3

GB asks audience to turn to face away from the den, towards where the tree has been left, lying on its side. Rachel discovers the fallen tree by removing the cloth. Dialogue is accompanied by sound of Rachel cracking twigs.

My tree!
Cracked, broken, snapped, twisted, crunched, smashed, damaged, dead.
My tree.
My poor tree.

DEVASTATION MUSIC (COMPLEX VERSION)

Rachel begins to cry

VIDEO: TWILIGHT

Working through the scripts in this way enabled us to layer signification and observe the resulting engagement behaviours of the PMLD audiences, providing a range of observations and material which would be carried forward to the making of *White Peacock*.

Reflection

In the final phase of *Thumbs Up*, the focus moved back to the practitioners and their reflections on the key organising question for

this phase of the research: how can the three spectra, and their combinations, working within a micro-theatre context, be used to foreground moments of emotional narrative for PMLD audiences? The reflections were based on two questions: what did you explore, and, as a result of that exploration, what did you find out? In order to keep this summative process rooted in practice, I invited each member of the team to use their specialist art form as the *modus operandi* through which they fed back their thoughts. What follows is my record of those feedback sessions. The summative feedback is followed by a series of figures that record the reflections of the students. These student reflections are written in the first person, having been translated from my discussions with the companions, and I present them here in coloured text. I believe that this retains the centrality of the PMLD audience to the iterative process. The general thoughts of the practitioners are recorded in black text in the figures and were recorded throughout the *Thumbs Up* phase in the practitioner notebooks.

In order to retain clarity within this chapter, I present the observations of each spectrum discretely, despite our explorations having been flexible and collaborative across the art forms. I begin with the thoughts of Sakina (SK), our designer, who reflected specifically on the design of a micro-theatre as a conduit for the three spectra.

i) The Micro-theatre

SK created a model of a micro-theatre to share with us during the reflective phase. See Figure 6 for a draft plan. The rationale behind the design was a summary of discoveries and observations she had made throughout the residency at Oak Field School. Her design had the dual purpose of shutting-out the distractions of the world beyond the micro-theatre space and to provide a blank canvas upon which the narrative could unfold. She felt that if the micro-theatre itself (in effect, a theatre building) was *too* visually, aurally and haptically engaging, it would be over-stimulating and possibly interfere with emotional engagement. It also needed to be an adaptable space, especially if the piece was performed with informal proxemics encouraging flexible spatial relationships between performers and audience. Such a space could contain blinds, flaps and curtains according to the piece that was being performed. She clearly put forward the opinion that the micro-theatre needed to be a theatre *building*, not the setting for a specific piece. Its functionality was thus located within the outer frame of a broad cultural construct, not within the inner frame of a fictitious location. We discussed the need for the designed, specific, locational space within the micro-theatre to return to non-specific neutral space at the end of the

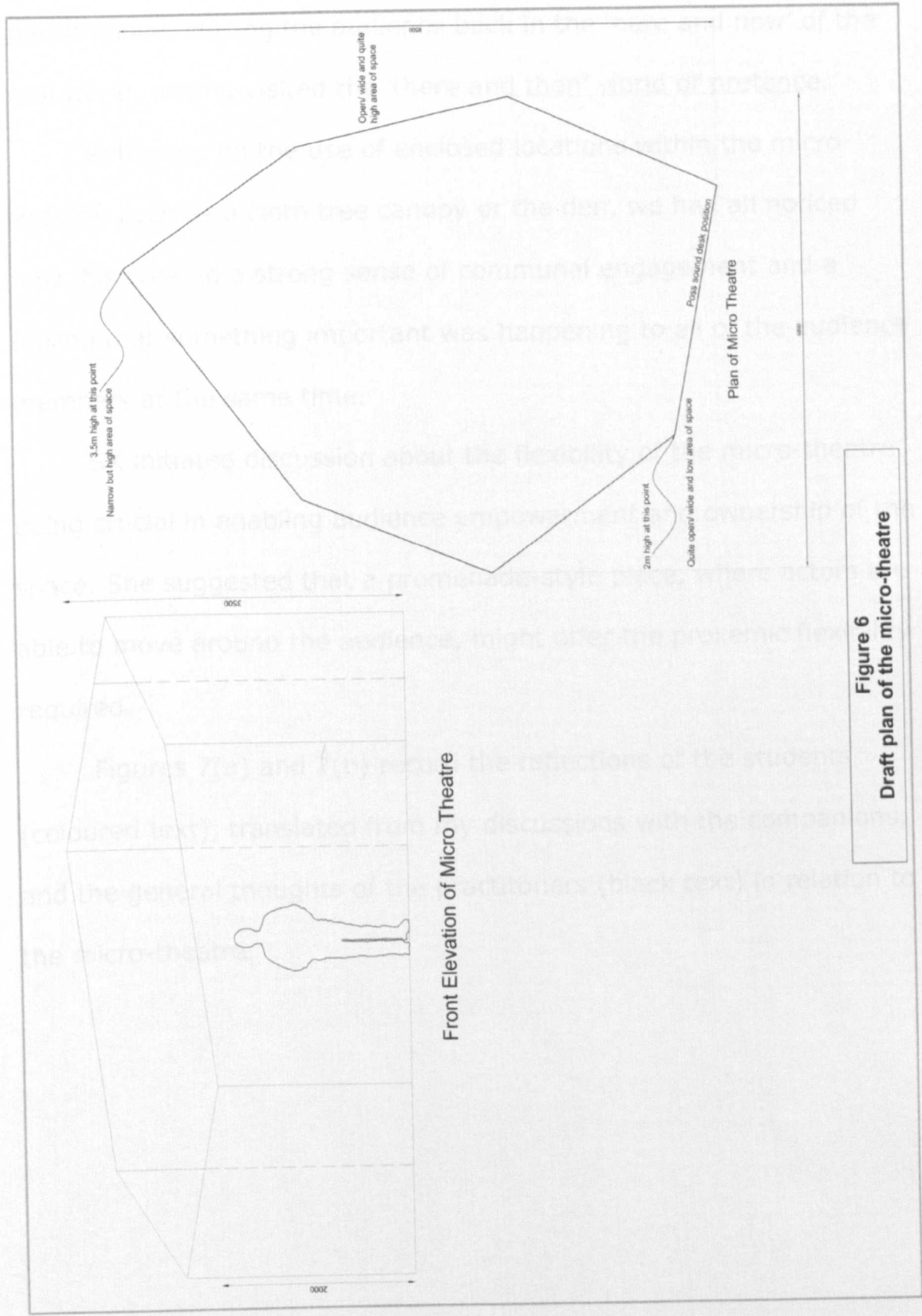


Figure 6
Draft plan of the micro-theatre

performance, placing the audience back in the 'here and now' of the real world, having visited the 'there and then' world of pretence.

Reflecting on the use of enclosed locations within the micro-theatre, such as a cloth tree canopy or the den, we had all noticed how this created a strong sense of communal engagement and a feeling that something important was happening to all of the audience members at the same time.

SK initiated discussion about the flexibility of the micro-theatre being crucial in enabling audience empowerment and ownership of the space. She suggested that a promenade-style piece, where actors are able to move around the audience, might offer the proxemic flexibility required.

Figures 7(a) and 7(b) record the reflections of the students (coloured text), translated from my discussions with the companions, and the general thoughts of the practitoners (black text) in relation to the micro-theatre.

Practitioner key:
GB = Gill, Lead researcher/writer
SK = Sakina, Designer/micro-theatre
JS = James, Videographer/darkness-light
MM = Matt, Musician/silence-sound
CB = Cat, Actor and story teller/stillness-action

Re: a pond- the more epic and communal the better but audience members must still be able to reject the activity and move away.

GB

It might be possible for a sensory experience to be done collectively eg in a large rock pool. Teachers can already help students put their feet in a bowl. The communal rock pool becomes a theatricalised event.

SK

We all felt it was best when we were under the tree: a micro-set within a micro-theatre. Enclosure helps me to concentrate.

If we want to build-in choices we need to be able to work all round each audience member. If not, they have things 'done to' them and lose autonomy.

GB

The micro-theatre is useful for projecting close to the audience on multiple surfaces/textures.

JS

You could take the students anywhere in the universe, or anywhere in their minds in a micro-theatre space.

GB

Figure 7(a)
Micro-theatre reflections: part 1

Practitioner key:
GB = Gill, Lead researcher/writer
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MM = Matt, Musician/silence-sound
CB = Cat, Actor and story teller/stillness-action

Installation versus blank canvas? Micro-theatre is the theatre not the set.
SK

The micro-theatre is like the water's edge. You can put a toe in the water and then retreat.
SK

What can I do in a micro-theatre that I can't do in my classroom?

- be in a space that shuts out the world
- be offered a range of resources to create an atmosphere
- experience theatre
- experience the flow of a story helped by theatre

Black versus white space. Calm subdued dark spaces versus bright, strong light in white spaces.
SK

Projecting onto black may be overwhelming. We could use a black gauze. White space is more uplifting without projection. But PMLD students are used to interacting with white sensory spaces. This may raise expectations of interaction which we can't meet.
JS/GB

Figure 7(b)
Micro-theatre reflections: part 2

ii) Silence-Sound

Matt (MM), the musician and composer exploring the silence-sound spectrum, had created an eleven-minute musical piece to begin his reflective session. The piece was to be listened to whilst wearing blindfolds and its purpose was to emphasise the power of music when the sense of sight is absent. It contained a series of sequences reflecting an emotional journey through a story.

Based on a composition software programme, MM had also created a diagram representing the complex options available to a musician whilst working with PMLD audiences such as rhythm, tempo, volume and pitch. The diagram visually represented the number of possible permutations which could be used to customise sound preferences for individual audience members. For example, Lily might engage best with loud, rhythmic sound with a slow tempo sung by a performer moving round the space with an up beat mood. An example of this can be found in Figure 8. MM's reflective thoughts were focused on custom-building music to create individualised auditory landscapes. He felt that with only six PMLD young people in the audience it might be possible to customise the approach within performance, once the generic musical score had been composed.

In terms of general conclusions which he would wish to carry forward, he presented some thoughts about the use of wash, a term which we had explored in full throughout the research and



Figure 8
Customising the silence-sound spectrum

development process. He suggested that wash or background sound, even if it was 'emotional' in tone, was not as useful as 'foregrounded' composition in engaging Lily. He had observed audience members engaging with sound 'events' composed to *highlight* emotional moments rather than to *underscore* them. MM had judged the level of audience engagement through the physical and verbal stillness within the micro-theatre. He suggested that he had witnessed moments of 'shift' whereby the interest in the music overpowered the students' interest in themselves.

MM had also observed the success of ascending musical scales in building anticipation and focus within performance. Additionally, he felt that some PMLD audience members might relate particularly well to a specific musical style such as rap or rock. Clearly PMLD teenagers without hearing impairment have access to a range of music, within both the home and the educational setting, and will have had cultural initiations into the musical form. MM used this when playing his accordion to lead the audience into the performance space, requesting favoured styles via the companions and reflecting those styles in his playing. If this idea was to be applied to a performance context, the musician would need knowledge of individual musical tastes in advance as part of the unique cultural library.

Figures 9(a) and 9(b) record the reflections of the students (coloured text), translated from my discussions with the companions,

and the general thoughts of the practitioners (black text) in relation to the silence-sound spectrum.

Practitioner key:
GB = Gill. Lead researcher/writer
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MM = Matt. Musician/silence-sound
CB = Cat. Actor and story teller/stillness-action

Resolution of chords - explore the moment between waiting for something to happen and it having happened.
MM

In order to bring attention to the start of the piece, let's try the model of a Tibetan Buddhist ceremony. Where drums and bells and cymbals fill the air with noise. These three sounds cover the auditory spectrum from low to high. If played randomly with a pulse this can give the impression of breaking-up, fragmenting the space, almost disorientating. The main purpose of this is to create a real sensation of - silence. Since silence is not necessarily the absence of all sound but the feeling of void, anticipation or calm. This would be the ultimate sound/silence example and create a frame for the silence in which to place music.
MM

**I smiled when you emphasised
the resolution from discord at
the end of the greeting song.**

**I didn't like loud noises
but when the musician
built up to them, I was fine.**

Wash seemed to calm me.

**I was very happy when you
Repeated the song in 3 parts.
(Harmony)**

Trying vocals in different octaves: 'head' voice is better to gain attention. (Rather than 'chest' voice)
CB

Background sound does not engage. It is wash.
Foreground sound does engage. It is an event.
MM

Lyrics seem to be better than humming for holding attention. May be about the articulation of sounds.
MM

We must use prosody, the melodic features of spoken language.
MM

**Figure 9(a)
Silence-sound reflections: part 1**

Practitioner key:
GB = Gill. Lead researcher/writer
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Using non-naturalistic rhythm (as opposed to regular heart-beat with predictable rhythm) lessened distress but maintained engagement.

MM

Could we have speakers under a raised stage so people could feel vibrations?

SK

Using ascending scales really engages but is common in under-fives TV. How can we make this age appropriate?

MM

**I was unsettled by the atmosphere
in the room which you created
through voice and music.**

**When music happened
I started to tap my board,
followed the music with
my eyes. Liked the loud
stuff with a defined beat.**

**If you use a gentle rising pitch,
I will open my eyes. If you use
abruptly rising pitch, I will close
my eyes and appear to be
withdrawing.**

If all frequencies are played together in theory it is called 'white noise'. This is like if all colours are mixed to make white. This sounds like a 'hiss' and a spoken 'pssst'. It can be very directional. The sound of a cymbal contains a lot of white noise. Into the silence there could be placed calm music with these qualities: - slow moving [slow tempo], long held notes [but not static], soft instruments [instruments with a soft 'attack' that does not jar as they start to play such as flute, oboe, strings], a narrow dynamic range [not too much variation of quiet and loud], a narrow harmonic range [similarly with low and high notes], a gentle undulating feel with no big jumps in the melody, repetition of motifs [fragments of melody] to give a sense of permanence, calm, familiarity, a comfortable, recognisable melody to place over the repetition.

So: to build drama from this?

- Each/any element can be altered/metamorphosed.
- Increase the tempo. This can be gradual or sudden and also be able to speed up/slow down in increments with each episode lasting shorter times... leading to a constant faster tempo.
- The held notes change- some become shorter, faster moving - some held entirely still, unchanging [classic horror story technique]. High held notes tend to portend a sudden shock. Low held notes tend to portend an episode or approaching situation.
- Harsher instruments, or the same instruments played with more attack. Adding percussion, the most 'attack heavy' type of sound.

MM

Figure 9(b)
Silence-sound reflections: part 2

iii) Darkness-Light

Throughout the residencies in schools, I had placed the emphasis on the use of video technology to explore the darkness-light spectrum within the micro-theatre rather than the use of stage lighting. This was largely because I already had some experience in using light and colour to create engagement and mood, as outlined in the previous chapter, which would inform the making of a new piece. I was, however, interested in finding out if video technology had a part to play in making emotionally engaging narratives for Lily and her peers. Thus our discussion was limited to reflecting on videographic ideas to foreground emotional narrative, rather than those connected with stage lighting or special effects.

James (JS), our video artist, observed that video images accompanied by music or sound were much more engaging for the audience than when they appeared on their own. An example of this was when an image of a stick figure with a sad facial expression was accompanied by melancholic music. The combination of music and sound appeared to stimulate engagement.

We discussed the difficulty of knowing if audiences were reacting to patterns of light or whether they actually understood the images that were being projected. In other words were the signifiers more 'legible' than the signified meanings? I suspected that the degree of understanding inferred from the images would be different for each member of the audience.

JS had observed the high level of engagement when projecting images onto hand-held drums, creating in effect, portable screens which could be moved around the space at various heights according to the positioning of the audience members. This seemed to be especially engaging when images of black stick figures appeared on a white background.

One of the most important darkness-light issues under discussion was the overall colour of the micro-theatre space and how that would impact upon visual acuity and atmospheres created by light within it. A black projection background created a significantly different cinematic atmosphere compared to that created where images were projected onto a white background. Whereas students are accustomed to looking at images on whiteboards, projecting onto black fabric made the theatre feel like a cinema and seemed to hold attention more intensely.

It was agreed that PMLD students without visual impairment are likely to have an extensive visual repertoire due to the role that TV and computer screens play in their lives. TV images seldom, if ever, appear without music or sound, which may explain why images with sound within the micro-theatre were more likely to hold attention, and thus engagement.

We had all observed that the projection of images onto people's faces and hands created a rich visual texture that seemed to draw the focus of audience members.

Figures 10(a) and 10(b) record the reflections of the students (coloured text), translated from my discussions with the companions, and the general thoughts of the practitioners (black text) in relation to the darkness-light spectrum.

Practitioner key:
GB = Gill. Lead researcher/writer
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CB = Cat. Actor and story teller/stillness-action

Giant torches can illuminate objects and people.
JS/SK

Certain colours 'ping' when projected onto black. What happens if we use a foil surface, collage or textured surface? Can we pull projection surfaces around the space on a curtain track?
JS

Back-story versus protagonist (background v foreground) in video images. Some students might not relate to the face and only see the background, others will relate to the face and not to the background.
JS

**I needed my head turned downward
so I could see the screen. I smiled
when I finally found the screen images.**

White is everything and black is nothing.
SK

Re: point of view in video images. Might the students prefer:

a) to see *through* the eyes of the character or

b) see the character *in* the landscape?
JS

Objects, people or places revealed by pulling curtains back is on both the darkness-light and stillness-action spectra.
GB

It would appear that visual images are 10x more engaging when combined with music.
JS

The actor on screen is not as engaging as the actor in the space.
JS

**Figure 10(a)
Darkness-light reflections: part 1**

Practitioner key:
GB = Gill, Lead researcher/writer
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CB = Cat, Actor and story teller/stillness-action

Slow motion allows processing time.
GB

Projecting an image onto a hand-held drum skin is very engaging.
Full team

It would be interesting to use parts of something as projected images such as leaves and then present an image of an entire tree.
JS

Projecting a moving image onto the face of an actor created engagement.
JS

I enjoyed looking at the white stick figure projected onto a black background.

To have video imagery at the same time as action and sound might be sensory overload. Should the video be the background to the drama?
SK

It might be possible to create tension by increasing the speed of the images projected. Fast-forwarding with increasing speed?
JS

It is possible that PMLD audiences have a good visual repertoire due to TV watching at home.
JS

It's not always clear if PMLD students are simply responding to patterns of light/dark or if they *understand* the images.
JS

To ease entry/transition into the micro-theatre, start with bright, atmospheric light?
JS

**Figure 10(b)
Darkness-light reflections: part 2**

iv) Stillness-Action

CB, actor and story-teller, had explored the stillness-action spectrum, creating a taxonomy of performance tools available to an actor working with PMLD audiences. This can be seen in Figure 11. This was a significant piece of theoretical work and one that, I believe, raises a useful question. That is: how can an actor explore *all three* spectra within their craft to best engage individual needs within PMLD audiences? CB's major argument was that there are as many ways of working as there are members of an audience, and that the skill of the actor in this context is to individualise their performance to the needs of each person. This echoes the performance styles of both Oily Cart and Bamboozle theatre companies, with their emphasis on Intensive Interaction and the strength of the performer/audience/companion triad, but I believe that CB's model significantly decreases the need for lengthy, and thus expensive, residencies to take place prior to performance. She suggests that the performer can work spontaneously with audience members, along with their companions, to 'read', and respond to, unique cultural libraries.

CB was interested in the notion that a play is a story that can be stopped and re-started. Parts of it can be re-visited to foreground, reiterate and amplify the emotion contained within, should the need

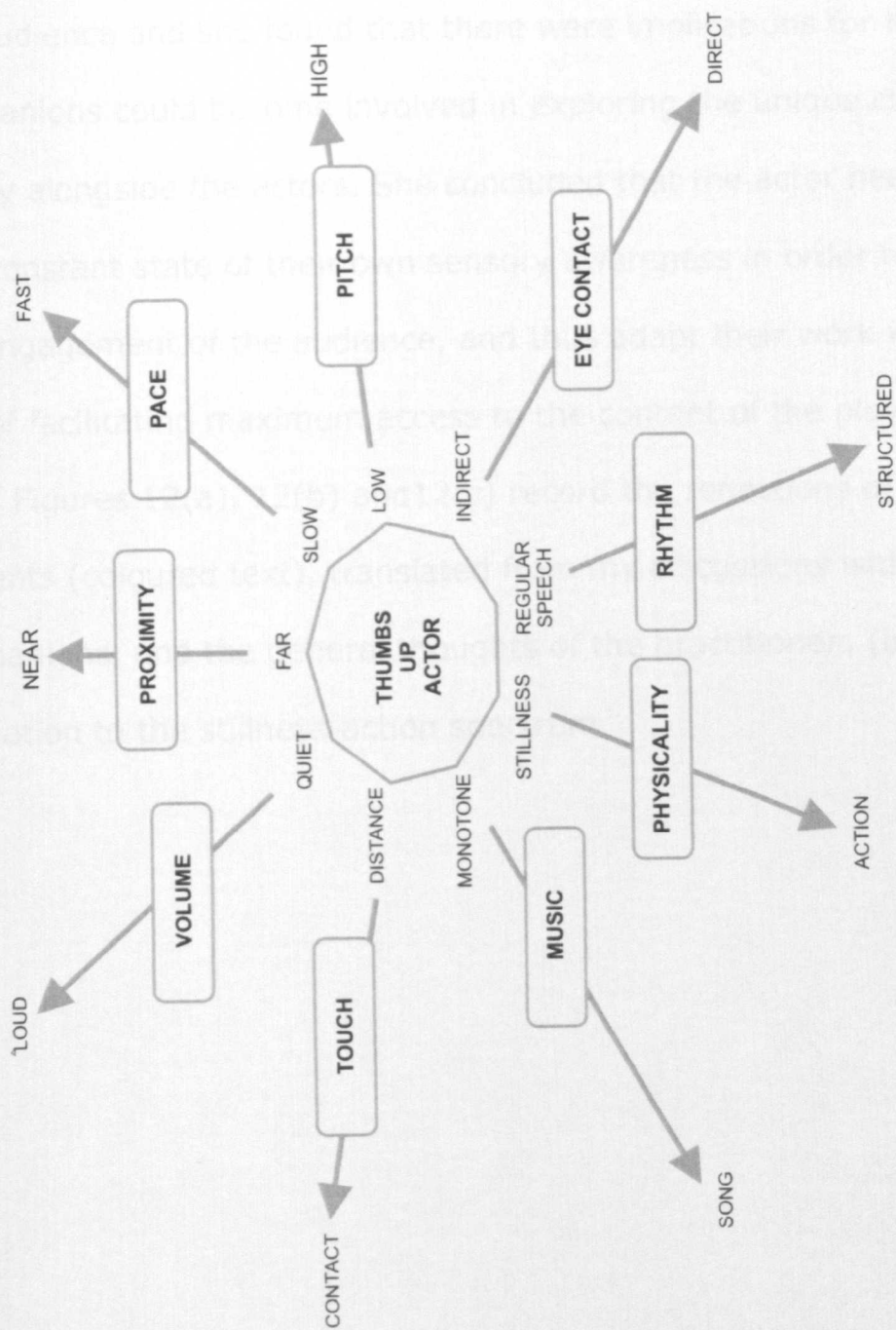


Figure 11
Boot's Taxonomy: performance tools available to an actor working with PMLD audiences

arise. She was particularly interested in how elements of Intensive Interaction could be used in developing connections with members of the audience and she found that there were implications for how companions could become involved in exploring the unique cultural library alongside the actors. She concluded that the actor needs to be in a constant state of their own sensory awareness in order to monitor the engagement of the audience, and thus adapt their work with the aim of facilitating maximum access to the content of the play.

Figures 12(a), 12(b) and 12(c) record the reflections of the students (coloured text), translated from my discussions with the companions, and the general thoughts of the practitioners (black text) in relation to the stillness-action spectrum.

Practitioner key:

GB = Gill. Lead researcher/writer
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JS = James. Videographer/darkness-light
MM = Matt. Musician/silence-sound
CB = Cat. Actor and story teller/stillness-action

Role of the actor in *Thumbs Up*: to provoke a reaction from the audience, to engage the audience emotionally, to take responsibility for the above and be part of telling a story

CB

Activity to stillness; inner tension (muscles) to relaxation (calm peace); loud to quiet; seeing parts of a character to seeing a whole character.

CB

**I inhabited the turf throughout.
Accessed the show through my
feet. Liked the water spray on
my toes and the turf/rough
leaves through the soles of my
feet.**

**I am usually shy with strangers
but was looking directly at them
from a distance. If approached,
I withdrew.**

A *Thumbs Up* actor is exploring within performance. Exploration is infinitesimal and barely visible to the spectator because it is about 1:1 connection.

CB

I want to bring the audience to 'my garden'. It is important for me as a character to have my own space and not be a weird person inhabiting their school hall. Do they need that inner frame to understand my story and invest in me? I do! Given that some students need to be worked with in such close physical proximity, stillness-action is in some ways not applicable because how does action translate to such a small area (ie around the student)?

CB

Figure 12(a)
Stillness-action reflections: part 1

Practitioner key:
GB = Gill. Lead researcher/writer
SK = Sakina. Designer/micro-theatre
JS = James. Videographer/darkness-light
MM = Matt. Musician/silence-sound
CB = Cat. Actor and story teller/stillness-action

Is it more appropriate to use 'absence-presence' as a sliding scale? If you are 'still' in the presence of a PMLD student, it doesn't mean much (because usual reception theory rules don't apply). They won't wonder who you are, they'll ignore you. If you're absent, they will tap into other stimuli (lights, music, etc). If you're present (right in front of them) they'll focus on you and nothing else. If you're present and moving around, you'll confuse them (action).

CB

**It is useful for me when you repeat a story.
That way, I am more comfy with the space and with you.**

**I often try to keep safe by showing distress.
I might be OK if you keep going carefully.
I might settle and come out of the other side.**

It is important to keep the sensory radar alert, trying things and allowing the students to tell you what they want and adding to your internal information bank.

CB

Sand or ball-bearings on top of speakers will react to sound vibrations.

MM

Figure 12(b)
Stillness-action reflections: part 2

Practitioner key:
GB = Gill. Lead researcher/writer
SK = Sakina. Designer/micro-theatre
JS = James. Videographer/darkness-light
MM = Matt. Musician/silence-sound
CB = Cat. Actor and story teller/stillness-action

It was like he was with *us* rather than with *himself*.
MM

Use of 'promenade' allows 1:1 performance. Maybe start in the classroom, move the students out, along corridors, into different rooms then into the main micro-theatre.
CB

Would it work to meet the characters in their own space (classroom) and gradually go on a journey through narrative and design to build-up to them entering the micro-theatre. Benefits: the performers would get to know the students on an individual basis first, whilst in character in small, intimate spaces.
CB

**I added a third word to my spoken vocabulary today.
I said 'baby'. If you give me enough time,
I might be able to understand things cognitively,
not just experience them through touch, smell or taste.**

**I need more time than you are
giving me to process the story.**

**I like to push stimuli away
as a way of engaging with them.**

**I want to be able to reject something
(like the turf).**

Must always allow time to resolve tension. It takes time and is unsettling otherwise.
CB

Costuming actors in an understated way allows for easy 'down time' within performance without putting stuff on and taking it off.
CB

The space felt clean and uncluttered when the facilitation of sensory activities was done by the actor and not the stage manager. They had a greater knowledge of the individual students.
CB

'Everyvoice' is key.
CB

Figure 12(c)
Stillness-action reflections: part 3

Having considered the three spectra, the last stage of our analysis saw a broadening of our discussion to encompass the multi-sensory approach, of which these spectra are a sub-set. We recognised that sensory interactivities involving smell, touch and kinaesthesia are a valid inclusion but to include them equitably has implications for the narrative. We discussed the issue of a centrifugal, turn-taking approach to multi-sensory interactivity within performance and how it can interrupt narrative flow. That is; by offering each audience member a stimulus in turn, there is the potential for pockets of time where neither narrative nor stimuli are being explored. As I discussed in Chapter One, Elam might describe these semiotically as *empty* 'brackets'.¹⁹ In the light of this, we discussed the possibility with SK of creating a collective sensory interactivity within the set, such as a large pond, into which everyone could place their feet at the same time should they choose to. This would be less disruptive to the narrative flow than if a small portable pond was taken round to each member of the audience in turn. This would, in effect, avoid empty brackets.

We discussed the notion that the multi-sensory interactivities, the tried and tested *modus operandi* of Bamboozle and Oily Cart, can create an architecture of form central to the content of the play in order to access meaning for PMLD audiences. For example, turf pillows *meaning* 'garden' haptically through the physical contact with

¹⁹ Elam, p. 88.

the face or rolling feet over broken twigs *meaning* that there is a fallen tree without the need for denotation to create these meanings.

In a general discussion about character and plot, there was agreement that a dramatic narrative exploring events, of which the audience had had direct experience, may increase emotional engagement, whereas a piece that was based on a traditional story, perhaps with non-contemporaneous characters, may need a greater degree of explanatory intervention by a companion to enable Lily to access the narrative. It was felt that, although the quirky story-telling style of *Harry* created a joyful feeling in the room at the beginning and end of the piece, the concept of being lost was too distant from Lily's life to be accessible. She was unlikely to experience 'lost' because she was unlikely to be given the freedom to become so. *Tree* however, seemed to offer Lily a greater range of emotions, with the students engaging particularly well with the storm and the sadness of the fallen tree. Thus some of the basic narrative moments of *Tree* re-emerged during the making of *White Peacock*.

There was some debate about the desirability of audiences seeing two forms of the same play on one day with a break in the middle. The purpose of the first performance might be to form relationships with the actors via the unique cultural library, to feel comfortable in the space and to access the basic story. The second performance might add the three spectra in order to foreground the emotionality of the story. In educational and cultural terms, I felt that

this idea was an interesting one, enabling a cultural initiation to take place, along with the creation of an horizon of expectations, during the first performance. Lily might then engage with the fictional world, and the emotions enacted within it, during the second performance.

At the end of *Thumbs Up* I felt it best not to draw firm conclusions from the experience that could prove restrictive whilst making the play for the next phase. Participatory action research of this nature is full of significant variables, and anything I was taking forward to the next stage of the research needed tentative, rather than dogmatic, application. *Thumbs Up* was part of a much longer research narrative producing experience in its own right. A set of guiding and shaping reflections, however, was emerging, based on audience feedback along with that of the practitioner team which would be carried forward into the main practice as research phase. These reflections were as follows:

- A black micro-theatre, functioning as a theatre building within a school building, appeared to be helpful with issues of disattendance and focus.
- Collective, rather than polarised multi-sensory interactivities retained focus and interest and avoided boredom.
- It was empowering if the actors and the PMLD audience operated centrifugally for some of the time within the space, working close to, or far from each other, according to individual preferences.

- It seemed to be important to the development of the outer frame for the audience members to freely enter and exit the micro-theatre throughout the performance.
- Foregrounded musical events, rather than background wash, stimulated emotions.
- Ascending scales with clear chord resolutions deepened emotional response.
- Video images, accompanied by sound, gained attention.
- White stick figures projected onto a black projection surface seemed to reinforce the narrative.
- A portable projection surface, such as a drum, created a clear point of focus.
- The story-telling was most engaging when the actor was able to calibrate the use of the three spectra according to the needs of individual audience members.
- It appeared to be useful for engagement to repeat the performance to the same audience.

These guiding thoughts represent only a fraction of the learning that took place during *Thumbs Up* and was carried forward into the making of *White Peacock*. More subtle, and impossible to record, were the amorphous but important findings resulting from a month spent working alongside specialist practitioners and PMLD young people. It was that lived experience which fundamentally progressed my

thinking towards a cogent discourse, supporting the aims of Article 31, for regional producing houses wishing to improve access. These guiding thoughts, supported by that lived experience, along with the emergent plot ideas, are fully explored in the next chapter as the construction of *White Peacock* is analysed through the lexicon of that discourse.

Chapter Four

White Peacock: Part 1.

The audiences, the case-study school and the themes.

Exploring how Bennett's outer and inner frames are useful in ensuring ethical engagement in emotional narratives which have been foregrounded using the three spectra approach.

Lesley:

Come on, Jas. Dip your thumb in this ink. It feels lovely and cool.

Jasmine presses her thumb onto the ink pad.

Jasmine:

I'm looking at my thumb. It's got ink on the end. Very black. My companion is holding a piece of paper in front of me and asking me to make a mark on it. She says that when I've done the mark, I will be able to see the peacock play. It's coming to our school hall in a theatre.

Jasmine rocks from foot to foot moving the inky thumb between her mouth and nose.

I don't want to put the ink on the paper because it will go away from my thumb. I like it on my thumb. It smells black. Tastes black too. Of course I want to go to the peacock theatre play.

Jasmine's companion waits.

This chapter, and the two which follow it, have the performances of *White Peacock* as their focus. The research question which underpins all three is: having explored the three spectra as foregrounding devices, how might Bennett's outer and inner frames be utilised to ensure that engagement remains ethically safe and supportive of Poppy's right to engage *freely* with emotional narratives, as outlined in Article 31? In Chapter Four I take forward a number of foregrounding strategies emerging from *Harry* and *Tree*, and examine the effect of the micro-theatre approach on the range of audiences which would encounter *White Peacock*. I then outline my research design for this phase, moving on to describe the collaboration with Oak Field School and Nottingham Playhouse to develop the themes and plot of the piece. I consider three models of play-making which have relevance to the collaborative process I undertook to discover the themes and plot of the play: the dramaturgical stance of Brecht, Oddey's devising approach and Spencer's playwright-led practice, in order to position *White Peacock* within current discourse. The chapter contains the full script of the play.

Responsibility to Multiple and Diverse Audiences

Poppy and her peers were not the only audience for whom I had the responsibility of providing an accessible theatre experience. PMLD audiences and their companions comprised only one component of the overall audience types who would experience *White Peacock*, as

outlined in Figure 1. Thus the observations I carried forward from *Thumbs Up* needed to inform a piece that spoke to diverse audiences. Art Borreca writes that 'the dramaturg may be a facilitator of the process by which the theatrical event comes to *embody* thought – and perhaps, in some productions, even theory itself'.¹ Thus there were multiple responsibilities informing the embodiment of theoretical thought within praxis. The introduction of the play to the outside world, via a range of communities who would experience it in a different way to the PMLD audiences, was important in terms of the future sustainability and credibility of my research, and therefore was a tacit factor in its creation.

Beyond the immediate dyad of PMLD audience members and their companions, heterogeneity would be the constant state throughout the tour of the play. As part of Nottingham Playhouse's Roundabout Education programme, *White Peacock* would be performed a further thirty-three times to over two hundred PMLD people and there would therefore be a range of additional audience members whose experience was of peripheral importance to the research process, but who would nonetheless be affected by it. This exposure to wider audiences was key to the impact of the project beyond my case-study group and would be a model of practice to other regional producing houses.

¹ Art Borreca, 'Dramaturgy in Two Senses', in *What is Dramaturgy?*, ed. by Bert Cardullo (New York: American University Studies, 2009), p. 159.

I felt that the 'complex exchanges' present in the micro-theatre space would have significant impact on non-disabled audience members unaccustomed to such otherness surrounding them within a theatre space.² Subsequently it would be important to enable *everyone* to engage fully with the inner frame, empowering non-disabled audience members to contribute to the multiplicity of 'channels' throughout the performance in a way that might be anathema, or even disruptive, within some other performance settings.³ This is a variant on Elam's 'channels', expanding the bi-directional connection between performer and audience into a multi-directional system of pathways.

Research Design

I created a case-study group for *White Peacock* to enable me to address the question: having investigated the potential of the three spectra to engage PMLD audiences in emotional narrative, how are Bennett's outer and inner frames useful in ensuring that this engagement remains ethically safe by enabling PMLD audiences to participate freely in this cultural experience? Key to this process was the implementation of rigorous ethical protocols within the research design, which would value and safeguard the voices of the case-study students throughout.

² Ubersfeld, p. 23.

³ Elam, p. 26.

Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy, Rose and their companions enabled me to develop and observe the complex exchanges that typify the audience member/companion/performer triad. Illustrating the importance of these exchanges as the basis for research, Jean McNiff writes that they need to be:

... naturalistic, involving the people who would naturally be participants in the research, for example teachers, and democratic, in that the actors' opinions are as valid as the observers.⁴

An exploratory case-study structure, as suggested by McNiff, took into account the involvement of a companion in the interpretation of the students' responses in order to represent their views accurately. It allowed me to follow lines of enquiry and to develop data-generating methods according to the emerging needs of the case-study group and which only became apparent once the process was underway. As McNiff has suggested, case studies support the view that each person's individually constructed world can make a contribution to the iterative participatory action research process. Key to this methodology was the careful negotiation of consent described below.

There were three specific elements to the consent process: capacity, information and voluntariness, and I will deal with each of

⁴ Jean McNiff, *Action Research: Principles and Practice* (London: Macmillan Educational, 1988), p. 15. The term 'actor' is used to signify the person who is the main subject of the research rather than a performer.

these in turn.⁵ I was guided by the staff at Oak Field School with regard to the individual capacities of the students to understand the nature of the study and how we might facilitate their agreeing, or otherwise, to take part. We negotiated that I would work in the school in a variety of occupational roles over eight weeks. It must be emphasised that this amount of contact with the school was to enable me to function as a researcher, not to enhance communication pathways during the performance itself. It was key that I learnt elements of the students' unique cultural libraries so that I could *read* their desire to consent. I worked as class teacher, story-teller, teaching assistant and lunchtime supervisor, and in my role as story-teller, I began to introduce the story of *White Peacock* in order to build up the students' capacity to know what it was they were consenting to.

It was important to communicate two basic areas of capacity. Firstly, the students needed to understand the *White Peacock* story in order that they could decide whether or not they were interested in it, and secondly, they needed to understand that their feelings - and therefore their emotional engagement - were important to me *during* the story. In order to achieve this I added detail each time I told the story, eventually working through its entirety, developing their understanding of the narrative and the emotions within it. To address the importance of feelings in the research, I carefully illustrated each

⁵ *Consent Handbook*, ed. by H. Rutherford Turnbull (Washington DC: American Association on Mental Deficiency, 1977)

section of the story with appropriate emotions using vocal tone, body language, PECS symbols and Makaton signs and I visited the school a total of six times prior to the case-study day.⁶ An extract from my field journal can be found in Appendix 3, which illustrates how I approached the development of capacity during a story-telling session.

Voluntariness was the element of consent that most concerned me, as I did not want to disempower the students by enforcing their involvement in *White Peacock*. In fact, the process of 'reading' consent proved to be easier than anticipated, as the following extract from my field journal illustrates. There were originally six case-study students but Student X communicated his dissent in the form of agitated and stressed behaviour:

N, S, L and M discussed the inclusion of X in the case-study group at my instigation. His involvement is potentially stressful for him facing stimuli which might be unsettling. Most crucially, I was uncomfortable about not having gained consent. If we are working under the principle that S's group have consented by wanting to remain in the room/round the table working with me, then X had clearly not consented. His behaviour around me had been consistently negative, showing signs of distress and desiring to be elsewhere. I was also concerned that his behaviour would impact negatively on the other members of

⁶ Makaton is a system using signs, symbols and speech designed to support spoken language.

the case-study group, causing them to disengage at a time which would seriously affect my ability to gather data. Finally, I was sensing a degree of teacher stress about both of the above points. Whichever companion was with X would feel a sense of responsibility. On balance I felt that I needed not to include X in the group.⁷

This 'remaining in the room' sign of consent became my guiding ethical principle and is explored throughout this and the following chapters. I believe it was key to accessing the rights embodied in Article 31 and, in Bennett's terms, to empower the students to be emancipated spectators.

Once tacit agreement was given, I undertook the formal process of gathering consent forms from parents and students. Information was sent home about the project and parents returned the signed forms and the students consented by making a thumbprint at the bottom of a letter explaining the process ahead. University protocols required that I preserved the anonymity of the case-study group and so the students needed to choose pseudonyms for themselves. To make this process appropriate to their cognitive capacity, I invited them to choose photographs of flowers or trees, through gaze and eye tracking. As a result of her visual impairment, the student who became Rose chose her new name through smelling rose and geranium essences and selecting the former. The names of

⁷ Field Journal p. 15.

these flowers or trees were also names for people. Thus, the case-study students became known as Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose. It is unlikely that any of the group understood the reason for this process and, whenever I was working alongside them, I used their real names to minimise confusion. Having gained consent, I could move forward, and what follows is a theoretical analysis of how I went about finding the themes and plot of the play, alongside this group of young people and their companions.

The Play-making Process

The creative process behind *White Peacock* was a complex one and in order to schematise it as a foundation for analysis, I have considered three overlapping and interrelated models of play-making. The models are a dramaturgical approach, playwright-led work and devising, with the creation of *White Peacock* containing elements of all three.

Brecht records the complex collaborative dramaturgical process he undertook in pursuit of his play-making. He writes of how 'we organized small collectives of specialists in various fields to 'make' the plays'.⁸ This notion of a team of specialists was at the heart of *White Peacock's* genesis, beginning with the *Thumbs Up* phase and continuing throughout the writing process. In contrast, Spencer views play writing initially as a solo, introspective activity stating that: 'A

⁸ Berthold Brecht, *Brecht on Theatre*, trans. by John Willett (London: Eyre Methuen, 1978), p. 78.

play is a journey you take alone first, then with your collaborators and ultimately with the audience'.⁹ In common with Spencer's description, creating *White Peacock* was a three part process, but comprising different components: it began collaboratively, then I worked alone to create a script, ultimately re-forming into a collaborative partnership with the creative team and the audience. In her analysis of the devising process, Oddey recognises multi-factorial demands informing new work, and writes that: 'Any group concerned with devising theatre-in-education must consider how people learn and look at the relationship between teachers, pupils and the company'.¹⁰ This reflects the devising elements of the second and third parts of my tripartite process. Having introduced these three models, I now explore them further, and explain why the term 'dramaturg' most accurately describes my role within the creative process.

Reflecting on Brecht's work, Mary Luckhurst usefully positions the role of the dramaturg as key to the placement of audience as learners: 'From the outset the dramaturg frames the debate as experimental performance and mines it for its value as a practical learning strategy for the participants'.¹¹ Clearly, Luckhurst's use of words such as 'debate', 'experimental' and 'mine' hint at the iterative

⁹ Stuart Spencer, *The Playwright's Guidebook: an insightful primer on the art of dramatic writing* (London: Faber and Faber, 2002), p. 204.

¹⁰ Alison Oddey, *Devising Theatre: a practical and theoretical handbook* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1994), p. 33.

¹¹ Mary Luckhurst, *Dramaturgy: a revolution in theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 115.

nature of creating work through collaboration, with a pedagogical stance. This view of theatre-making in the context of new learning gleaned from collaborative thought and practice, as is the case with my writing for Poppy, is in contrast to the motivational factors inspiring playwright-led work. Spencer, for example, states that the inner drive to write a play is based in our own personal 'ur-play', the play inside us that we need to write.¹² His definition of this subconscious impulse bears little resemblance to the gestation of *White Peacock*, which was a play I felt the *audience*, with the support of their advocates, were asking me to write. Spencer, of course, has his audience in mind when writing, stating the need to 'write plays that contain compelling images that will collide with the audience and strike a spark in them'.¹³ However, I would posit that Spencer assumes that the audience understands the cultural purpose of such collision, an assumption that is not applicable to PMLD audiences. *White Peacock* was created from the external needs of the audience which then irradiated *inwards*, and Spencer's 'ur-play' is at odds with that process, as it reflects a paradigm that begins with the writer and radiates outwards.

In common with many devisers and dramaturgs, when I approached the task I was mindful of the specificity of both the intended audience and the needs of the performing team who would be realising the vision. In her description of the motivational factors

¹² Spencer, p. 26.

¹³ Spencer, p. 14.

underpinning devising companies, Oddey refers to this audience-centric approach, arguing that 'groups devise theatre for, with, or from a specific audience, and therefore the nature of the spectator-actor relationship is a very particular one'.¹⁴ It was the particularity of the relationship outlined above which was at the core of this writing process as I sought to give a voice to silent new audiences as they became initiated into a previously unattainable cultural event.

The 'giving of a voice' as a motivating force is illustrated by Luckhurst, who writes that:

The employment of dramaturgs is also associated with conscious promotion of theatre by and for [] minority groups such as women playwrights, the disabled, young offenders and in particular children's theatre.¹⁵

This is of clear relevance to Poppy, who falls within two of Luckhurst's quoted categories, and I was mindful of the concomitant responsibilities within the term 'conscious promotion' when applied to PMLD audiences. *White Peacock* was, in many respects, a silent commission, with the companions and teachers working alongside me to consciously promote the importance of this work by and for Poppy, in clear pursuit of enabling her to participate freely in the art form of theatre as a member of an audience.

¹⁴ Oddey, p. 20.

¹⁵ Luckhurst, p. 72.

Finding a Theme and a Basic Plot

In his writing about the sociology of reception, Pfister acknowledges that theatre-makers need to take into account the background of a potential audience and writes:

The author must take the audience's predilections and intellectual background into consideration in the production of his (sic) text if he is at all concerned to achieve [] a successful form of aesthetic communication.¹⁶

These predilections were happily and enthusiastically voiced by Oak Field and one of the major features to emerge from my partnership with the staff was their openness in articulating what would be appropriate content for a play. They clearly wished to harness the power of theatre to develop emotional literacy skills amongst their PMLD students. Discussions with P, Deputy Headteacher at the school, supported this realisation. I recorded her views in my field journal:

Most significantly, she (P) made many interesting comments about the importance of providing a rich, sophisticated emotional narrative for these audiences. She believes that her students have the capacity to understand a much bolder emotional landscape than I had previously thought.¹⁷

¹⁶ Pfister, p. 31.

¹⁷ Field journal: 10/1/10

P's encouragement to create bold narratives was supported by my observations throughout the performances of *Harry* and *Tree*, during which the audience members engaged willingly with the foregrounded, crafted emotional moments, as recorded in Chapter Three. The audience members had been particularly engaged with the moments of anxiety in *Harry*, sadness in *Tree*, and happiness in both pieces at the moments when problems had been resolved. We agreed that, because of their emotional intensity, certain events could be re-used from the plot of *Tree*, such as the storm, the blowing down of the tree and the finding of a box. We also discussed the importance of the plot having strong connectivity to the lives of the students who would experience it. I believed that this connectivity was more likely if the plot was uncomplicated and near to the audiences' lives in terms of character and relevance. The further away the character and time from the here and now, the more responsibility would lie with the companions to explain the story and the people within it.

Discussions with P centred around the notion of adolescence and the transformative effect that this transitional phase has on all young people. Specifically, P was interested in how PMLD young people require support and modelling in handling emotions, devoting much of the Oak Field curriculum for Key Stage 4 students to exploring this issue. The following quote from my field journal records how Oak Field uses emotions within its teaching:

The school has a 'self curriculum' through which everything is taught. Much of it is to do with PSHE and deals with the students being at the centre of their own understanding of the world due to their developmental delay. Everything is related to 'self'. So each pupil in P's class has an Individual Education Plan which is about engaging with emotional content. Drama/theatre is useful for this, in P's view, because it is a way of rehearsing reactions to emotional situations within the safe environment of the classroom. The school has the view that you can't help what you feel but *how* you handle that feeling is your responsibility. It also became clear that P is teaching students with severe autism about feelings THROUGH feelings. Her mission is to create emotional behaviour through modelling and positive management.¹⁸

In order to support this, I felt the overall theme of the piece could tackle the emotional turmoil of adolescence and specifically in terms of plot, model a young person dealing appropriately with those emotions, emerging with greater maturity having done so. In other words, our central character could undergo a transformation. Thus, the general theme of 'transformation' was arrived at through a process of negotiation, not with my inner voice as a writer, which Spencer would suggest is key, but with the companions and teachers who knew what they were hoping to encourage their students to

¹⁸ Field Journal, 8/7/09

experience at a particularly transformative and transitional point in their lives. 'Transformation' encapsulated the emotional journey informing the play, whereas 'transition' offered a more pragmatic curriculum foundation which I now explore.

The notion of transition has a specific relevance within special schools with significant curriculum time within Further Education departments being dedicated to exploring the issues surrounding transition from school to college, dependence to independence, and child to adult. In 2009 Birmingham City Council commissioned Bamboozle Theatre Company to create *The Transition Project* with the rationale behind this initiative being stated as 'investments in this transition period will reap rewards in terms of young adults' contribution to society.'¹⁹

Transition has also been the subject of theoretical exploration in relation to theatre. For example, Eugenio Barba refers to transition being 'itself a culture' in anthropological terms, and I had certainly witnessed schools embedding the notion of transition into the curriculum for students who were approaching the school leaving age, marking rites-of-passage with music, dance and drama.²⁰ I hoped to explore precisely this culture of transition within the piece and so the specific central theme of *White Peacock* became a young man's emotional transformation from dependence to independence. This is

¹⁹ Christopher Davies, 'Using Drama to Prepare Pupils for Transition and Change', *National Association for Special Educational Needs*, special edition pamphlet, May, 2009.

²⁰ Eugenio Barba, *Paper Canoe: a guide to theatre anthropology* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1995), P. 5.

described as a rite-of-passage within Noel Greig's schema of story-types, in which the 'protagonist faces a test or series of tests in order to grow or develop as a human being'.²¹ This reflects one of the specific rites-of-passage faced by disabled people as they make the transition towards independence from their parents, either to live in a more independent setting and/or to form new relationships. These issues, with universal relevance to all audiences who would see the play, were component parts of the central theme. Staff at Oak Field felt that to tackle these issues within *White Peacock* would be a positive contribution to PSHE within, and beyond, the school.

Having decided that the theme would be about adolescent transformations/transitions, I sought advice from P about which particular transformation we should take as the key topic in the play. We agreed that the central character would be a young person embarking on a relationship with a potential first sexual partner. We viewed it as a valuable opportunity to explore an emotional landscape that would probably be new to the students. With regard to this central character, P and I felt that the actor should be a wheelchair-user but we also agreed that no reference to his/her disability should be made throughout the play. This was in order to normalise disability rather than accentuate it. PMLD young people within special schools have daily exposure to wheelchair use and therefore there is no concomitant stigma or social discomfort. However, we felt that

²¹ Noel Greig, *Playwriting: a practical guide* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2005), p. 189.

this is not the case for broader non-disabled audiences and so the presence of a wheelchair-user within both the cultural space of the theatre, and the imaginary space of the play, would be desirable. Fundamentally, the play was to be about a young man and a young woman, not about a disabled young man and a non-disabled young woman. There were also benefits to be gained with regards to engagement and connection with a PMLD audience. The main character would be permanently at the same eye-line as the audience, assisting communication and minimising the potentially patronising act of 'crouching down'. Seeing someone who is a wheelchair-user could also bring a sense of connectivity with the audience, perceiving him to be of 'their world'.²²

Once I had decided on the theme and certain elements of the plot, I embarked on an instinctive process of constructing the play. At this point I made a deliberate choice not to be consciously guided by the theoretical discourse, discussed in Chapters One and Two, but to enable prior knowledge gained as a practitioner, specifically from *Thumbs Up*, to inform the construction. Linking theory and practice would come later and is the subject of the analysis in Chapter Six.

In order to embed the foregrounding insights from *Thumbs Up* within a performance, it needed to be recorded in a format communicable to the team of people whose job it was to support its creation. Challenging though this was in the light of the multi-sensory

²² P, Deputy Headteacher at Oak Field. Recorded in informal notes during *Thumbs Up*.

nature of the piece, it was important to produce a recognisable script for professional colleagues within Nottingham Playhouse technical departments. I now explore this process in greater detail.

Scripting the Play

The challenge lay in the conflation of two text types. Mick Wallis and Simon Shepherd describe the difference between the 'dramatic text' and the 'theatrical text' with the former being read as a script and the latter being 'read' by the audience in performance.²³ I questioned the two-dimensionality of the written word as a starting point when writing for an audience who would experience the text through a range of senses within performance, an issue which I discussed in my introductory chapter. For *Poppy*, the 'reading' of the script in performance would be through an entirely different set of sensory routes from those used by readers of the paper script. I felt there was a gulf between these two text types, which could inhibit the play-making process. Contractually, Nottingham Playhouse stipulated that I needed to produce a draft script in order to brief the production team and casting director, so, in order to meet this obligation, I created a 'tone script'.

This proto-script was an attempt to combine both of Wallis and Shepherd's text types in order to position the needs of the PMLD audience at the centre of the professional process. This was made

²³ Mick Wallis and Simon Shepherd, *Studying Plays*, 2nd edn (London: Bloomsbury Press, 2010), p. 2.

possible by using a range of media to tell the story of *White Peacock*. Each page was dedicated to recording an event in the story and was a tactile object in its own right. Individual pages stated the narrative points, sensory text, emotions and key words attached to that event. These markers were crucial in fulfilling the overarching aim of the project, which was to engage the audience as active emotional spectators in the play. The key words were to guide the actors, and ultimately the companions, in how best to achieve this aim. The completed tone script was sent to the designer, composer and producer and was shared with the actors, teachers and my case-study students. An image of a page from the tone script can be found in Appendix 4.

The evolution from tone script to rehearsal draft took place over a six-month period and the actors were presented with a paper version of the latter on the first day of rehearsals. The evolutionary process was informed by reflections on *Thumbs Up*, my ongoing visits to Oak Field to work with the case-study students, and discussions with the composer, designer, producer and production manager. This enabled the symbiotic process of both dramatic and theatrical text creation to take place. Of course, these collaborations were ultimately woven together by myself as the playwright, enabling the creation of a paper script with which to embark on the final stage of the play-making process: devising the multi-sensory interactivities with the performing team which would operate as collective and polarised

access points. As we would not be using a pre-performance residency model - a feature which typifies the work of Bamboozle and Oily Cart - these interactivities would be important opportunities for the actors, alongside the companions, to develop knowledge of the unique cultural libraries of the audience members. These interactivities will be examined in greater detail in Chapter Six.

What follows is the final script of *White Peacock*. I have chosen to include it here rather than in the Appendix in order that it is placed at the centre of the thesis. It represents the mid-point of the research process, fundamentally informing that which follows both in terms of theory and praxis. It leads the reader into the next chapter which analyses the reaction of my case study students to the foregrounding of the emotional events within the play, and begins to address the efficacy of the inner and outer frames which I applied instinctively to its structure. Appendix 5 contains photographs from the dress rehearsal of the play.



Arts & Humanities
Research Council

**Nottingham
Playhouse**
education

Roundabout Theatre-in-Education

White Peacock

by Gill Brigg



*A new play for KS3/4 students labelled as having
PMLD, including those on the autistic spectrum*

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White Peacock was first performed at Oak Field School, Bilborough, Nottingham on 23rd June 2010.

For Nottingham Playhouse:

Sam	Dan Edge
Phoebe	Rebecca D'Souza
Musician	Matt Marks
Stage Manager	Ali Murray
Directed by	Gill Brigg
Designed by	Sakina Karimjee
Composed by	Matt Marks
Lighting by	Nick Morris
Film maker	James Stead
Produced by	Andrew Breakwell
Admin	Kitty Parker

The play was part of a collaborative PhD programme between The University of Nottingham and Nottingham Playhouse.
Funding for the PhD was provided by the AHRC.

For The University of Nottingham:

Academic supervisors:

Dr Gordon Ramsay
Dr Jo Robinson

Video recording by:

Hannah Gray
Rhona Wilshaw

Special thanks to everyone at Oak Field School for hosting the research project, especially David Stewart, Penny Evans and Seraina Dejaco.

Extra special thanks to the case study student group: Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose.

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'White Peacock' is an interactive play written for audiences labelled as having profound and multiple learning disabilities. Six young people at a time, along with 1:1 companion support, experience the piece within a specially designed micro theatre space. It is written for young people aged between 11 and 19 years of age but is also appropriate for adults with learning disabilities.

This script contains boxes entitled: 'emotional text' and 'key words for the audience'.

The 'emotional text' describes the underlying feelings of the scene and must be supported by all spoken and sensory text.

'Key words' are those which the audience will have been informed of prior to the residency in schools and will be supported by Makaton or BSL throughout the performance.

The action takes place in a large garden, in the UK, in late August. The year is the present.

The garden belongs to the family of Sam, a fifteen year old young man and he has known the garden since he was born.

Sam attends a residential school as a boarder during term time. It is the last night of the summer holidays and Sam has been at home with his family for 6 weeks. He is due to return to school the following day.

Phoebe lives next door to Sam. They have not met until the evening the play takes place. She is 16 years old.

Phoebe is the link between the audience and the text. She models courageous enthusiasm when faced with new experiences, gently encouraging the audience to have the same approach. Sam is the 'expert' in his own garden and Phoebe experiences it for the first time along with the audience.

Each time the word 'peacock' is spoken it will be accompanied by SFX of a peacock cry.

Prologue.

The audience enters into a neutral space. The tree is the only visible scenic element. The den is hidden beneath drapes, creating a surface for projection. The garden end of the space is hidden behind black tabs.

The audience members and their companions are encouraged to choose where to sit. There are a mixture of seats, stools and beanbags along with space for wheelchairs.

The actors settle the audience.

STAGE MANAGER:

Hello everyone and welcome to the play. It's called 'White Peacock.

My name is Ali (sign) and I'm the stage manager.

My name is Nick (sign) and I work the lights.

My name is Matt (sign) and I play the music.

My name is Dan (sign) and I play the part of Sam in the play.

My name is Bekki (sign) and I play the part of Phoebe in the play.

If at any time you and your companion need to leave the play for a few minutes, that's fine. Just come back when you're ready.

The first thing that will happen in the play is that you will hear your names.

Sam, Phoebe and the musician sing the names of the audience one at a time and then in complex canon with harmonies. The song ends with a resolved chord.

Scene 1

Emotional text: contentment, wistfulness, comfort.

Key words for the audience: Sam, holiday, garden, moon.

There is a change of light state.

SAM:

(moving into the centre of the space and addresses the audience)

Hi. My name is Sam. I'm going to tell you the story of what happened to me one night at the end of the long summer holiday. This is where my story begins.

Change of LX.

TRANSFORMATION INTO GARDEN.

SM reveals the pond by moving the tabs aside.

The space transforms from neutral to garden.

This is my garden and this is what happened

DEEPER TRANSFORMATION TO A HOT GARDEN AT DUSK. The lid is removed from the pond.

Change of LX.

SFX of birds at dusk.

The space now suggests dusk and sultry heat. The garden is a place of peace and tranquility.

Sam inhabits the space completely. It is his haven and he loves to be here at this time of day.

Tomorrow I have to go back to school. I live at my school and come home for the holidays. I've been at home for 6 weeks and tomorrow I go back to school.

I love my garden. I miss it when I'm at school. I especially miss seeing the peacock (SFX of peacock) that sometimes visits this garden.

It's too hot tonight. Not too hot for the peacock though (SFX of peacock). Most peacocks (SFX of peacock) live in India and it's very hot there.

*There is SFX of a **peacock cry** in the distance. Sam acknowledges the sound.*

The mood is deeply wistful.

Video: there is projection of a garden at dusk with trees, lengthening shadows, and eventually, a low full moon.

There are the sounds of bird song at dusk. There is the scent of honeysuckle, rose and geranium. The stimulus should draw the audience in.

The SM enters with the large drum.

SAM:

Guys, look at the moon...

SM and Sam move around each member of the audience bisecting the projector beam with the drum. As the audience member engages with the image on the drum skin a live drummed 'reward' is heard.

There is gentle underscoring.

Scene 2

Emotional text: Suspicion, awe, trust, adventure.

Key words for the audience: Phoebe, tree, peacock, friend.

Phoebe enters while the moon activity is taking place and sits at the foot of the tree.

SAM:

This is my favourite part of the garden.

Change of LX to foreground wherever Phoebe is sitting.

It is a long way from the house with tangled trees and branches that weave above my head.

But most of all it is my favourite part of the garden because this is where I sometimes see my peacock.

PHOEBE:

(confident and a little cheeky)

Are you talking to me?

SAM:

(miffed)

What are you doing here?

This isn't your garden.

You can't just walk into someone's garden and sit down under their tree.

PHOEBE:

(realising, embarrassed but defiant)

I'm really sorry. I thought this was part of the wood. *(Pause)*. It is quite wild. I came through a hole in the hedge.

SAM:

You live next door?

PHOEBE:

Yes.

SAM:

Since when?

PHOEBE:

We moved in about six months ago.

SAM:

Oh, well, this is part of our garden. You shouldn't be here really.

PHOEBE:

I've often come and sat under this tree and I've never seen you before. I didn't realise it was part of your garden.

SAM:

When do you come here then?

PHOEBE:

I normally come here in the afternoon but it's just so hot tonight, I thought I'd try and cool off a bit.

SAM:

That'll be why I haven't seen you. I live at school most of the time. I come down here pretty late each night during the summer holiday. We've never been here at the same time.

PHOEBE

Well, I should go home.

(pause)

SAM:

Have you seen it?

PHOEBE:

What?

SAM:

The bird. The peacock.

PHOEBE:

No? Are you having a laugh? For real? Where?

SAM:

Here. It's a white peacock.

Sometimes it stands just over there and it often sits in the tree.

PHOEBE:

Well, I've never seen it. Where is it?

SAM:

We're making too much noise. We'll have scared it away by now. It'll come back though.

PHOEBE:

(Looking around) **This must be a huge garden.**

SAM:

Would you like to see the rest of it?

PHOEBE:

OK

SAM:

What's your name?

PHOEBE:

Phoebe

SAM:

I'm Sam. *(They shake hands)*

GARDEN ACTIVITIES

Change of LX to light the full space.

The formality of the performance space dissipates as both actors encourage the audience to explore and choose activities.

There is underscoring with Garden Wash.

Activities:

- *exploring the pond with Phoebe including putting feet in the water, looking at the submerged lights, touching the wet stones in and out of the water, feeling the contrasting textures in and around the pond, sitting on the grass bank.*

- *exploring the reed screen with Sam including following a green torch beam which Sam shines through the screen, touching the texture of the screen with hands, feet or faces, peeping at someone on the other side of the screen, hiding.*

- *exploring strips of turf taken from the base of the grassy mound. The musician manages this task. It includes placing the turf under cheeks, hands, heads, feet, touching the muddy side of the turf, smelling and tasting the grass.*

- *exploring a basket of herbs with the SM. A range of seasonal (summer herbs) are offered for tasting, feeling and smelling.*

There should be a sense of discovery and spontaneity with the actors facilitating from within role. The activities are carried out with sensitive negotiation with attention being paid to preference and choice wherever possible.

As Phoebe moves around the space, encouraging the sensory activities she informally reinforces the beauty of the space and that she likes Sam .e.g.

'Hasn't Sam got a beautiful garden? It's kind of him to let us have a look round. I'm really glad I didn't go home. I love it here'.

After a while, the tree canopy is unfurled as the reed screen is struck. Sam invites companions to hold the edges of the canopy. He leaves his wheelchair and lies beneath the canopy inviting the audience to join him.

The underscoring segues into a more formed piece of composition.

Change of LX to shine green light from above through the canopy.

After a while, Phoebe encourages everyone to hand her the canopy. It is struck and taken outside the space leaving the basic tree feature in place.

Video : the white peacock.

SAM:

There it is. The white peacock!

Music: White Peacock Theme.

There is a projected image of a white peacock within the space. Sam and Phoebe watch the peacock. Phoebe is transfixed.

Scene 3.

Emotional text: fear, awe, excitement

Key words for the audience: storm, rain, thunder, loud

The space becomes dark. There is a flash of lightning. (Video or LX)

PHOEBE:

Whoah! There's going to be a storm!

I love storms.

Let's stand here and watch.

SAM:

The garden's thirsty.

Music: chaos theme.

Sound of rain. More lightning and thunder.

SAM:

Phoebe. I think we should go into my den.

PHOEBE:

What?

SAM:

My den.

PHOEBE:

**You mean there's a bit of you're garden you haven't shown me?
Won't your parents wonder where you are?**

SAM:

**No. They're out walking the dog. They'll get wetter than us.
Anyway... they don't fuss.
What about your Mum and Dad?**

PHOEBE:

They don't know I'm out. Come on then. Let's go.

SM enters the space.

SM:

You can all watch while we make Sam's den here.

The audience watches as the den end of the space is transformed by the SM, Sam, Phoebe and the musician. The final act of transformation is the bisection of the space with tabs.

Throughout the transformation there is musical accompaniment with recorded poetry.

Thunder, rain and war

Indra slides down the peacock's tail feather
Landing on a mountain to claim it as his own
Fierce, the warrior consumes land with noise and light.

Indra wears the peacock's crown
Claiming he is a king, a God
Consuming rivers, fields, farms and seas
Powerful, the soldier flies crackling with power

Indra soars on peacock's wings
Brewing the thunder that deafens the world
Fearful, the earth covers its ears with trembling hands.

When the transformation is completed, the audience is invited by Sam to join him in the den by going through the tabs.

Scene 4

Emotional text: relaxed, calm, safe

Key words for the audience: den, safe, warm

Sam's Den is an utterly unexpected place. It is influenced by his knowledge of peacocks and the Indian sub-continent. Sari fabrics, bells, incense etc. There is part of a wall dedicated to his peacock-themed collection of newspaper cuttings, photos, stuff off the internet etc. That part of the den is extremely well ordered and precisely arranged.

Sam and Phoebe use a torch to illuminate parts of the den. There are electric tea lights. The noise of the storm continues very quietly. The atmosphere is in contrast to the raging storm outside.

Sam involves the audience by inviting them to explore the things in his den. Everyone should feel at home and calm.

A long fleece blanket is available for people to wrap around themselves. Music with recorded voices:

Nest

In my den
(in my nest)
I am safe

Safe from the storm that rages outside
It's soft and it's calm in this place where I hide
In my den
In my nest

In my den
(in my nest)
I am safe

I'm here looking up at the thunder outside
I'm here looking down at the people inside

In my den
In my nest

PHOEBE:

Sam, this is amazing.

SAM:

**No-one's been in here except me.
It's like this because of the white peacock.**

PHOEBE:

How do you mean?

SAM:

**Well, I'm interested in peacocks, where they originally come from, facts about them, stories about them.
Most peacocks live in India. Most of the stuff in here comes from India.
They live wild there.**

PHOEBE:

Where does *your* white peacock come from then?

SAM:

Someone nearby might have kept him as a pet. Some people keep them as pets in this country. And in zoos. I think maybe my peacock escaped from a zoo. He really loves to sit in the tree. It's his place. He sits there with his tail hanging down like long white hair.

PHOEBE:

He'll get soaked in this storm, Sam.

SAM:

No. He'll be hiding out of the rain. He won't be far away, though.

PHOEBE:

I'm going to find out if the rain's stopped.

Phoebe goes to the entrance to the den and places her hand outside. It is sprayed with water. She reacts.

Oh no. It's still raining. My hand's wet. Does anybody else want to feel the rain?

This activity is carried out with a sense of fun and adventure. The audience can choose to put their faces in the water spray. The opening of the flap is the cue for the rain SFX to crescendo, with the closing of the flap signalling a return to silence.

After this activity the storm subsides.

During the storm the tree canopy is removed from the space.

PHOEBE:

The storm's over, Sam. Come on...

*The den tabs are swept aside. Phoebe and Sam lead the audience out of the den. The tree canopy has gone. There are twigs on the floor.
The audience sits. Change of LX to foreground the sticks and absent tree.*

Scene 5

Emotional text: sadness, happiness, loss

Key words for the audience: tree, broken, box, sad, baby, photo

SAM:

Oh no. *(He sees the tree has fallen down during the storm.)*

PHOEBE:

The tree.

SAM:

The peacock's tree.

PHOEBE:

Your tree.

SAM:

My tree.

PHOEBE:

The storm blew it completely down.

SAM:

**It's his roost...where he sleeps.
Can you see him anywhere?**

They look for the peacock.

PHOEBE:

I can't see him anywhere, Sam.

SAM:

He's gone and my tree's gone.

Sam picks up a pile of sticks and snaps them as he speaks.

**Cracked, broken, snapped, twisted, crunched, smashed, damaged, dead.
My tree.**

Sam cries. Phoebe is awkward and explores the hole left by the tree roots. She discovers a box.

PHOEBE:

**Sam, Sam, what's this? It must have been buried underneath the tree.
What's inside?**

Sam takes the box. As he opens the lid, his face is illuminated

SAM:

**These are my things from when I was a baby. My Mum and Dad told me
that they buried a box underneath this tree when I was about one year old.**

PHOEBE:

Why did they put the box here?

SAM:

**It was the biggest tree in the garden. They said that they hoped one day
hundreds of years in the future someone would find the box and set free
the memories inside.**

PHOEBE:

Set the memories free! O.K. (with cynicism)

SAM:

My Mum's a bit soppy like that.

PHOEBE:

**It didn't quite last hundreds of years underground.
Let's have a look.**

Phoebe lunges for the box. Sam snaps the lid down.

SAM:

No way.

PHOEBE:

Go on.

She tries again and manages to open the lid. As she does so their faces are illuminated and there is incidental music.

Oh no... Sam! Did you really wear this? (*holds up a babygrow and shows the audience*)

Sam is mortified. He closes the lid.

PHOEBE:

What else is in the box? Come on Sam. Open the box

Again she prises open the lid.

Phoebe repeats this process with the other objects in the box. It should have the feel of a game. The objects include: a photo of Sam as a baby, baby clothes, a soft toy. The audience should enjoy the conspiracy with Phoebe.

SAM:

Right. That's it! You've had your fun. This is going in the den.

Sam puts the box in the corner of the den.

Scene 6

<p>Emotional text: elation, 'electricity' strength, independence Key words for the audience: sleep, mobile phone, Dad, kiss</p>

PHOEBE:

(looking into the distance) **Shame about the peacock. Maybe he just flew away for a while. He might be back tomorrow.**

SAM:

I'm going back to school tomorrow. I won't be home for six weeks. I live at my school during term time.

PHOEBE:

Oh. *(With genuine disappointment)* **That's a shame.** *(pause)*

SAM:

It's a real shame, Phoebe.

PHOEBE:

(Out of an awkward silence) **Erm.. I should go, Sam. It's really late.**

SAM:

Oh.. yes....it's late....

Pause

PHOEBE:

Thanks for showing me round. It's been a laugh.

SAM:

Yeah. Apart from when I cried.

PHOEBE:

Yeah. *(the tension breaks)*

She takes out her phone

Let's take a photo. Come on

She takes a photo of them both with her mobile phone.

Bye then.

SAM:

Bye.

Phoebe kisses him on the cheek. A musical crescendo leads the audience into the moment. It isn't just a 'peck'. The kiss is repeated three times. She leaves.

Silence.

Sam's mobile phone rings .It is a Bollywood ring tone. He answers it. We only hear Sam's side of the conversation.

**Dad? I'm right down the bottom of the garden.....I'm fine
..... The tree fell down..... The big one with the box underneath.... full of
my old baby stuff.break it to Mum, gently.
Dad.... There's something I'd really like to do.....I'd like to stay in
the den overnight..... Please. Pleeese. Dad, I'm fifteen.
pleeeese?.....Cool! Night.....Love you too.**

Sam re-enters the den.

He sleeps.

SM enters.

SM:

You can watch while I open up the back of Sam's den.

The SM opens up the back of the den to reveal a black screen. The star cloth is illuminated on the ceiling of the den.

Sam's dream is represented by a series of slides depicting the story of the stormy night and his meeting Phoebe.

There is musical accompaniment with recorded lyrics.

Stars

The peacock moves around the velvet sky
Dropping diamond stars here and there from his beak
They land
Settling into their soft black cloak to shine all night.

The peacock perches high upon the moon
Keeping his eyes trained across the starry view
And if
The diamond sparkle fails
He flicks his tail feathers across them until they re-ignite.

The peacock picks its way across the sky and
Shakes the velvet cloak at dawn
Collecting

The diamond stars until they are needed again.

During this sequence, Phoebe enters the space and places the photo (the one she took with her phone) and a peacock feather next to Sam.

Scene 7

Emotional text: exhilaration, joy

Key words for the audience: morning, feather, photo,

Dawn gradually breaks.

There is a peacock cry.

Video: projection of a full coloured peacock.

SAM: (speaking gently, with awe, to the peacock)

Hey buddy.

I've never seen you in daylight before.

I've only seen you in the moonlight.

You're not a white peacock at all. You're a fully coloured Asiatic pavo cristatus!

As the peacock turns to leave:

Don't go.

As the peacock tail opens, Sam moves to the screen facing the image .The image fades.

He discovers the peacock feather and photo. On the photo she has written her mobile phone number along with a series of kisses. This image is projected.

She must have delivered this when I was asleep... through the hole in the hedge. Phoebe's phone number!

He punches the air with a 'yesssss' and kisses the photo.

As he does so, the whole space transforms into a peacock. There is colour, light, and a giant peacock tail. Drums are handed out. Members of the audience can interact with peacock feather fans, drums and the giant tail (which opens and closes). There may be dancing. There is music with recorded lyrics:

One Hundred Eyes

One hundred eyes
Wide, brave
Tail open
One hundred eyes
Pale, grey
Tail closed

One hundred eyes
Blinking in the shadows
Tail open
One hundred eyes
Hiding in the night
Tail closed

One hundred eyes
Ready to see
Tail open
One hundred eyes
Blind for now
Tail closed

One hundred eyes
Staring at the future
Tail open
One hundred eyes
Lowered to the ground
Tail closed

One hundred eyes
Watching from a distance
Tail open
Two eyes
Watching from a distance
Tail closed

After a period of ecstatic celebration (with echoes of Bollywood):

Sam moves to the edge of the space.

The Bollywood glory slowly diminishes.

TRANSFORMATION BACK TO NEUTRAL SPACE. *Change of LX.*

Sam re-enters the space.

.....and that is what happened to me one hot night at the end of the long summer holiday. This is where my story ends.

Final music and song contains names of the audience members and an individual 'thank-you' to everyone.

Epilogue.

SM enters.

SM:

That's the end of the play. We hope you enjoyed it. If you'd like to, please take a peacock feather home with you to remind you of the story. It's been a pleasure meeting you all. Thank you.

The audience leaves when each member is ready to do so.

THE END

This chapter chronicled the making of *White Peacock* and brought together the two key research questions of this project. If the foregrounding power of the three spectra to create emotion-rich narrative theatre could be combined with safe ethical frameworks, it might be possible to offer regional producing houses and practitioners a replicable model. The chapter examines the behaviours of Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose as audience members within the *White Peacock* micro-theatre in order to construct and refine that model in Chapter Six.

Chapter Five

White Peacock: Part 2.

The theatre goes to Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose.

Data collection.

Jasmine and Lesley are on their own in Green Classroom. There is the sound of accordion music fading into the distance. Jasmine is standing in the corner with her hands on both walls.

Lesley:

Why don't we try again Jas? *(She waits)*

It's up to you. *(She waits)*

Jasmine rocks from foot to foot, then moves to her wheelchair, indicating that she is ready to travel somewhere. Pushed by Lesley, they follow the sound of the accordion towards the hall.

Jasmine:

I've come to the theatre. It is a very big black shape inside the hall.

There is a man playing a box. He might let me touch it.

Jasmine and Lesley approach the entrance to the micro-theatre, hovering at the door. As Jasmine reaches out to touch the accordion, a chord is played and the musician sings 'welcome'.

Jasmine:

No thanks.

She finds her wheelchair and is taken back to the classroom by Lesley.

White Peacock was performed three times to Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy, Rose and their companions within a micro-theatre at Oak Field School. This chapter records the emotional engagement of these case-study students in four major plot events foregrounded within *White Peacock* using the three spectra. Beginning with my rationale for repeating the play for my case-study group, I move on to outline the data-gathering methods I used to record their engagement and behaviour. This is followed by the observations themselves, presented as both generalised and specific data. The chapter finishes with my own reflections from my field journal and some emerging insights which I take forward to an analysis of the play in Chapter Six.

Repeating the Performance

White Peacock was performed to the group three times on the same day with the two morning performances being used for the data collection which is recorded here. The decision to perform for a third time arose spontaneously as the result of the afternoon session being unexpectedly available. Therefore it was not built into the research design and, with the exception of the observation of Bud's reaction later in the chapter, will not be referred to. Each performance lasted

approximately one hour and there was a 20-minute break between the two morning performances. The purpose of the repetition was to give the audience two opportunities to engage with the spectra as well as the broader multi-sensory interactivities. In the first performance, the students would become acclimatised to the micro-theatre, and the performers working within it, therefore constructing the cultural outer frame, the importance of which was discussed in Chapter One of this thesis. If they could build a horizon of expectations in readiness for the second performance, knowing what lay ahead, they might be more likely to engage with the key events and their emotional content, during the second performance.

In addition to this acclimatisation, repeating the play gave me the opportunity to check that any 'I get it' moments noted during the first performance were not merely chance, random reactions to unknown stimuli. It was also important for the students to experience the performances on the same day with only a short break between them, because of possible issues concerning short-term memory. It was entirely possible that to perform twice with a full day in between, would result in the students needing to start their cultural initiation again.

On a pragmatic level, this arrangement created minimal negative impact on the daily routine compared to returning to the micro-theatre the following day. Usual patterns of learning were disrupted for one morning only. This was particularly relevant to

those labelled as being on the autistic spectrum and whose 'lack [of] flexibility in thinking and behaviour' needed sensitive handling.¹

The performing team recognised that repeating the performance was a practical challenge. The communication pathways would be affected by mood, tiredness and level of arousal, which would change as the morning progressed. However, it was important, for the purposes of data collection, to offer the same basic performance.

Data Collection

In order to address the research question, it was important to have flexible, non-intrusive data-gathering methods, which would record engagements with the minimum of disruption or alteration. These methods were companion feedback sheets, video recording, and my own observations recorded in my field journal.

i) Companion Feedback Sheet

For reasons outlined throughout this thesis so far, the companions' capacity to interpret the students' emotional involvement was key. Their task was to record *emotional* engagement (as opposed to mere concentration or involvement in a multi-sensory interactivity) and also to record *how* they knew that their student was emotionally involved. It was this latter piece of data-gathering which would make

¹ Jordan, p. 129.

the most demands on the companions' knowledge of the unique cultural library of each student, reliant on the observation of idiosyncratic and subtle behaviours. I designed a feedback sheet (see Appendix 6) on which the companions recorded levels of emotional engagement during four specific moments in the play, rather than engagement in the play as a whole. These moments were those during which I had most utilised the three spectra as signposts to foreground emotions and were as follows: 'excitement' (the thunder storm in Sam's garden during which the students were invited by Phoebe to join she and Sam in the den; 'sadness' (the moment when Sam discovers that his tree has been blown down during the storm); 'love' (when Sam and Phoebe kiss) and 'happiness' when Sam invites everyone to celebrate the fact that Phoebe wants to be his girlfriend. We called this last moment 'Bollywood' for the purposes of the data collection.

I emphasised that the students needed to be freely 'drawn in' to these moments without additional signposting from the companions. We concurred that it was often tempting to signal very clearly when the students ought to be 'feeling' an emotion and to model responses. It would be tempting to say: 'this is really sad, isn't it?' effectively positioning the companion as a performer within the inner frame. But I needed the case-study students to experience emotions as a result of the signification created by the three spectra, *within* the narrative, rather than have to understand spoken signals

outside the narrative. These crafted emotional moments using the three spectra, in other words, needed to speak *for themselves* as much as possible, without the need for cultural translation by the companion.

I also asked the companions to be aware of their power to trigger emotion in their students if they found themselves particularly moved. Both parties needed to retain ownership of their respective relationships with the story to minimise the prismatic effect one could have on the other. I needed to see if the emotional moments could stand alone without being catalysed by the companion's own emotional behaviour. This clearly created a false *individualised* theatre experience when compared with the additional collectivity usually associated with being a member of an audience. For non-disabled audiences theatre is both an individual and a collective experience. Bennett posits that this collective membership for non-disabled audiences, may be predicated on the desire to experience an 'emotionally rewarding' cultural event with others.² For the case-study students, it was unlikely that such expectation would be in place, particularly during the first performance. They would not be aware that a 'major motivation' for being at the theatre is the emotion of the event experienced alongside other people.³ They had no way of knowing that happiness or sadness was expected of them. I needed the companion to be sufficiently confident to sit back,

² Susan Bennett, 'Theatre Audiences, Redux', *Theatre Survey*, 47 (2006), 2, 220-234 (p. 227)

³ Bennett, 2006, p. 230.

observe reactions and 'read' the emotional engagement levels of their students and to see if it was possible to challenge the assumption that 'support is a necessity' in terms of accessing emotional moments in theatre via companion signposting.⁴ This would help to establish whether the spectra were, in effect, the students' signposts.

The companion team was briefed about the sheets at the start of the school day. This took place within the daily hustle and bustle of special school life surrounded by distractions and other demands, and it was undoubtedly a challenging process to empower the companions to feel clear about the task ahead. However, this was always going to be the case in carrying out participatory action research within such settings, and to make it otherwise would be to falsify the true conditions within which the study was taking place. By the time I arrived in the classroom on case-study day the companions had allocated themselves the students with whom they would be working. Goodley warns that 'support can be disempowering and empowering depending on how the supporter enacts their support'.⁵ So, mindful of the potential danger of this dichotomy, I had already discussed with the class teacher the importance of careful allocation of the companions to the students and everyone involved was aware that the knowledge of unique cultural libraries, as well as a trusting relationship, were key components to the success of these

⁴ Dan Goodley, 'Acting out the Individual Programme Plan: Performing Arts and Innovative Social Policy for and by people with 'learning difficulties'', *Critical Social Policy* 20 (2000), 503-532 (p. 513)

⁵ Goodley, 2000, p. 527.

partnerships. The research relationship between companion and student needed to reflect Conroy's 'deep empathy and intimate dialogue'.⁶ All of the companions had a thorough knowledge of their students' unique cultural library and sensory preferences. The period of time spent working in the school prior to the case-study day enabled the companions to perceive me as part of the school team and I believe their capacity and willingness to co-operate with the data-gathering was largely due to my working with them over a period of time.

The companions were asked to observe four moments within the performance and to record, using a series of ticks, how emotionally engaged their students were at that moment. No ticks recorded that there was no observable engagement. One tick recorded that they were 'almost engaged', two ticks recorded that they were 'engaged' and three ticks recorded that they were 'very engaged'. There was some discussion about the definition of these terms, especially 'almost engaged' but the companions recognised that there is often a pivotal moment, prior to a clear engagement with a stimulus when a student decides whether or not to engage further. They either engage, to find out more about the stimulus, or decide that it is not of sufficient interest and ignore it. I also made it clear to the companions that they were not measuring engagement in relation to how other students in the group were reacting, but against

⁶ Conroy, p. 7.

how their particular student was behaving in the context of this new situation. Thus the sheets would be completed without the companion conferring, discussing or cross-referencing observations with their colleagues.

The companions were shown an example of what a completed feedback sheet might look like, using a fictitious student. I stressed, however, that whichever way they chose to record emotional engagement would be useful for me and would reflect their individual contribution to the process. This is a clear example of the importance of flexible design within participatory action research as a means of empowering the companions to record their observations in a way of their choosing, rather than an imposed 'correct' way, within the reality of complex inter-subjectivities. My aim was to encourage the companion's latent creativity throughout this process and for the natural enmeshment with their student to be used as a positive force.

The companions would be unable to make written notes *during* the performance due to their duty of care, along with the need to be visually alert to behaviours and reactions relevant to the research. Clearly there were some implications to this arrangement. The process would be reliant on specific details being remembered until such a time as they could be recorded on the sheet. Recording would have to be done out of the context of the performance space and some of the triggers of reaction or engagement might be recorded inaccurately. Having to record behaviour afterwards would inevitably

cause some degree of filtering through the companion's experience of the *entire* play rather than after each emotional moment, thus risking generalised reflection rather than moment-specific observations. Data collected at the end of the play could also result in the companion's own emotional response to both the play, and their student's reaction to it, affecting its accuracy. The companions and myself were aware that the situation was not ideal but we recognised that this was the reality of recording behaviour within the special school context. The impossibility of recording observations *in situ* meant that morning break and lunchtime would be needed for the companions to write down their observations. They did so silently in a corner of the classroom, without discussion, in order to capture the individual moments as accurately as possible. In order to make this process easier, I worked in the classroom to supervise the students after both performances to allow the companions to record what they had witnessed. I stressed that rough notes were sufficient and that they need not be concerned with spelling, grammar or punctuation. It would be possible for me to check what the rough notes meant after the event if need be.

ii) Video

As a result of the retrospective nature of completing the sheets, there was general agreement that the use of video recording as an *aide memoire* was justified. Video cameras are used extensively within

special schools to record activities that can be reviewed afterwards in order to record and celebrate student achievement. This well-embedded practice meant, to the benefit of this study, that there was no shyness or reticence on the part of the companions about appearing on the recordings.

The performances were filmed with two separate video cameras. The cameras were operated by volunteer graduate students both of whom had worked on previous Roundabout Education projects at Nottingham Playhouse and therefore had experience of working within schools. They were fully briefed about the need to be discreet whilst filming within the space and not to interact with the audience throughout the performances thus creating unwanted stimuli. The challenge of minimising the disruption of audience concentration was key to gathering data in order that we could focus on the play, not on the means by which it was being recorded. The video cameras and their operators were not part of the crafted performance and therefore needed to have as subtle a presence as possible. The camera operators had spent the afternoon prior to case-study day observing the performance as audience members, so that they had a working knowledge of the text, the geographical locations of the action and the proxemics within the performance space.

The brief was for each camera to record half of the room throughout the performances so that evidence from the entire space

was gathered. There was to be a minimal amount of focusing on individual audience members through panning, tilting or zooming. The aim was to gather evidence which would *support* the companion feedback sheets rather than focusing on individual reactions which the camera operators deemed important. Gathering of specific and detailed evidence was in the hands of the companions, with their thorough knowledge of the unique cultural libraries of the students they were supporting. The University of Nottingham has clear ethical protocols surrounding video material gathered during research with the aim of safeguarding the anonymity of vulnerable groups. This meant that video material gathered remained the property of the school and would not be able to be disseminated to a broader audience outside the context of this study.

iii) Field Journal

The third method of data collection was my field journal which recorded my own observations of the case study students throughout the morning.

Case-study Observations and Insights

In what follows, I draw together evidence from these three sources to explore the reactions of the individual case study students to the two separate performances. I have tried not to embellish the observations and therefore the amount of evidence varies from student to student.

The specific observations are those recorded by the companions and the general observations are those I recorded in my field journal.

Ash

Performance One

Specific observations.

Ash's companion recorded emotional engagement for two sections of the play. 'Excitement' was recorded using two ticks and a description. 'Sadness' was recorded using three ticks (made bold with extra pencil marks) and a description.

I shall now describe these moments in greater detail using evidence from the companion and the video-recorded data.

Excitement (the storm)

Ash sat quietly whilst the storm began, listening to Phoebe and looking up at the lighting rig as the light states changed. He didn't appear to register excitement but seemed to be fully present and willing to take in the storm signals. He watched carefully as the den was being created and entered it with confidence. *'Ash happy to move into the den.'*⁷ He chose to leave the den during the quiet, calming sensory activities. *'Sat outside few times but made more of an effort to try to get me out of hall'.* In later discussions with his companion, she suggested that Ash may have been looking outside the den for

⁷ Companion quotes in italics throughout this chapter.

the storm in an attempt to re-experience the moment of stimulus.⁸ It may also have been that he preferred the darkened space to the brighter lights of the den.

Sadness (fallen tree)

Ash made a clear decision to leave the space as Phoebe was looking for the peacock prior to Sam's crying. He took his companion's hand and left with clear intention. *'Gut reaction; I felt Ash knew this was coming (and I don't know [the] story).'* In discussion afterwards his companion told me that Ash was picking up the 'sad' signals very clearly, choosing to remove himself from the tension of the situation.⁹ Outside the micro-theatre he displayed emotional behaviour such as *'grunting, kicking and pulling props out [of the] back of [the] theatre'.* After this, Ash led his companion back to the classroom. When she explained the happy ending of the story (I had emphasised this with the companion team prior to case-study day), Ash *'got up walked to the hall independently and straight back into [the] theatre'.*

General Observations.

Ash followed the sound of the accordion from the classroom into the micro-theatre with concentration and focus. His body language and speed of movement suggested that he was happy to find out more about the event, and needed no enticing to enter the micro-theatre. As the students' names were sung, he intermittently moved his head in time to the music.

⁸ Discussions recorded in my field journal.

⁹ Discussions recorded in my field journal.

He remained confident in the space as the piece began, looking around, turning his head toward lighting changes. He chose to explore most of the objects offered to him including the experience of sitting on the grass surrounding the pond. He smiled when holding and shaking the bells in the den. Ash appeared to be very clear in his choosing of stimuli. For example, when initially being offered the herbs to smell, he clearly pushed them away. I got a distinct sense that it was sufficient for him simply to be present in the micro-theatre and to be given the space to take in the inner frame. His companion corroborated this during later discussion. Throughout the first performance he appeared to be confident with the convention of being able to leave and return. Ash happily entered the den and chose to leave the space during the 'sad tree' part.¹⁰ He sat with his companion outside the micro-theatre for five minutes but chose to return to the classroom. I got a sense of Ash enjoying the presence of the characters, smiling when Sam and Phoebe first spoke with each other.

Performance Two

Specific observations

Ash's companion recorded emotional engagement for three sections of the play. This time 'Excitement' was recorded using three ticks and a description. 'Sadness' was recorded using three ticks and a

¹⁰ Phrase used by companion.

description. 'Happiness' was recorded using three ticks and a description.

Excitement (the storm)

Ash watched the den being set up very calmly, seeming once again to show no obvious signs of excitement. The emotion seemed to be stirred once he moved into the den. '*[He] got a little twitchy but stayed longer. He was first out of [the] den but even then didn't make great attempt to get out.*' This indicates that Ash was more relaxed inside the den than during the first performance although he did show some signs of tension. Interestingly, his companion recorded that '*When he walked out of the den the water didn't upset him (Ash doesn't like water)*'.

Sadness (fallen tree)

Writing about the transition from the den to the fallen tree sequence, Ash's companion records that Ash was '*still anxious [to] see this next part of the play*'. But she also observed that Ash showed signs of wanting to leave the space in advance of the fallen tree sequence. '*[He] was more relaxed second time around but still seemed to want to move out prior to 'fallen tree*'. He did, in fact, leave at some point, which wasn't captured by the camera, but he was recorded walking his companion around the outside of the micro-theatre. '*[He] was listening to [the] play just outside of [the] theatre. He had 5 mins out but came straight back in for the duration.*' This might indicate that Ash had remembered, and understood, that the story had a happy

ending and that the sad moment was something that could be endured.

Happiness (Bollywood)

Ash appeared to be relaxed and fully engaged during this sequence. He enjoyed having his own peacock feather, which he tasted and moved backwards and forwards across his skin. He also enjoyed the sensation of being fanned with the feather fan, shifting focus between his companion and the fan. Matt was drumming very loudly near Ash, which, apart from a slight startle reflex, he tolerated, remaining in close proximity to the source of the noise. He also interacted with the giant peacock tail, focusing on the moment when it opened in front of him. His companion records '*[He was] happy to move to [the] peacock and look at [the] feathers.*'

General observations

Ash was relaxed at the start of the second performance, again following the accordion from the classroom into the micro-theatre. He seemed to display little reticence despite having reacted very strongly during the sad moment in the first performance.¹¹ Ash seemed to understand that he was taking part in an event that was not real life and clearly understood that he did not have to stay inside the micro-theatre in order to experience the event. For a large proportion of the second performance, Ash chose to sit on a bean-bag, thus experiencing the action from a physically low-lying point of view. At

¹¹ 'Music box' was companion's term for accordion.

one point, he sat his companion on the bean-bag and then sat himself on her lap, possibly providing increased emotional security.

By the end of the second performance Ash had returned to a state of relaxation. This appeared to be helped by his being escorted back to his classroom by Matt playing his accordion, an experience which Ash clearly enjoyed enormously. He was *'very vocal at the end. I don't know how to interpret this but Ash was in a very relaxed state.'* *'[He] loved [the] instruments – listening to [them] only although did keep touching [the] music box.'* It seems that being able to experience the accordion through the sense of touch enhanced Ash's enjoyment and relaxation.

Bud

Performance One

There were no ticked responses for the first performance.

General observations

Much of Bud's experience of the first performance took place outside the micro-theatre and therefore wasn't recorded on camera. His companion, however, provided a rich description of Bud's tenacious struggle to engage with the play.

Despite initially following Matt and his accordion down to the hall *'Bud did not want to go in. I had the impression it was the darkness. He was very scared, his heart was beating fast and he started to self-harm himself. We tried several times, but coming near*

the hall made him run away in all directions. He had a few quick looks from outside but wanted to go back to the classroom and sit on his chair.' His companion was supportive of Bud's need to remain within the classroom. It was obvious from his behaviour that the prospect of what might happen within the micro-theatre was a huge barrier for Bud. Over break we agreed that we would try again and encourage Bud to come along to the second performance.

Performance two

Specific observations

This companion records engagement with two emotional moments of the play. 'Sadness' is recorded with a single tick and 'Happiness' with two ticks. Neither are embellished with any descriptions.

Sadness (fallen tree)

The camera recorded Bud sitting quietly and independently on his chosen chair. He had been taking a glimpse at the lights until the moment when Sam started to snap the twigs, when he appeared to look very intently, with focus, at the dramatic action. He then stood up and wanted to leave but decided, with the support of his companion, to stay. He then began to vocalise, listen to the music and he appeared to be listening to Sam crying. He was observed becoming very still, looking at Sam and leaning his body towards the action. He then took the hand of his companion. He watched Phoebe sign 'sad'

and then led his companion out of the micro-theatre when the music had finished.

Happiness (Bollywood)

Bud was observed sitting contentedly during this section of the play. He chose to take the feather fan that was offered to him and taste it. As Matt took the musical instruments round, Bud rested his head on the large tambourine and seemed relaxed whilst listening intently.

General observations

Bud's experience of the second performance was much more positive and he chose to move in and out of the play several times. His companion records that *'Bud came in with the musician and sat for a short time. He went in and out several times, sitting for a few minutes. He wanted to go back in but struggled.* I noticed that Bud left the micro-theatre just before the thunder and wonder if he may have remembered that there was a loud noise about to happen. His companion writes generally about Bud after he returns to the micro-theatre following the 'kiss' section and remaining until the end of the play. *'He sat till the end. He looked at the screen and at the lights. Hit the drum and listened to the music. He still was very scared. He was almost throwing-up and his heart beats. He took my hand a few times. I noticed it was mostly when the changes happened (light, screen, music) and he felt unsafe or scared. He put my hand on his stomach. He was struggling. He listened to the thunder. At one point*

he was crying. It seemed to me like he was involved with his own emotions. He pulled faces and seeked for support what he never does otherwise. I have never seen Bud so emotional.

Performance Three

I believe it is worth noting that Bud's companion recorded her observations of his involvement in performance three. She writes '*The third time he stayed almost for the whole play. Went out twice but managed to get back in and then went shortly out before the end. He seemed to enjoy it much more and at times seemed relaxed enough to get involved (lights, moon, touched tree, went up to dance and took Phoebe's hand). He even found his smiles again.*'

Lily

Performance One

Specific observations

Lily's companion recorded engagement for all four emotional moments of the play. 'Excitement' was recorded using three ticks and a list of specific observed behaviours. 'Sadness' was recorded with a single tick and one specific observed behaviour. 'Love' was recorded using two ticks and one specific observed behaviour. 'Happiness' was recorded using three ticks and a list of specific observed behaviours.

Excitement (storm)

Lily seemed to be very drawn to the change of light state which signalled the storm, turning her head to the lanterns and smiling. She displayed a quizzical expression while seeming to process the change that was taking place and then smiling. Her companion records that *'[she] made noises/peacock'* during the storm. This would suggest that Lily was reacting to the appearance of the peacock, in the form of a projected video image, just prior to the storm. Also *'she was reacting to the music/making noises'* during Phoebe's excitement and *'she clapped her hands'*. This behaviour was in contrast to the intensity of concentration which I observed Lily displaying when the den was being created. Her expression was neutral, focused and very still whilst the curtains were being moved across the space, dissolving into smiling. Once inside the den, Lily was *'reacting when her name was said/looking'*.

Sadness (fallen tree)

One tick was put on the sheet, augmented by the camera which recorded Lily displaying noticeable emotional behaviour. She smiled and vocalised during the twig-snapping. When the sad music grew in intensity, her smile became more intense and animated, indicating that she was tuning in to it in some way. When Phoebe signed 'sad' Lily reacted with very broad grins. She was emotionally engaged but was not displaying the emotion of sadness.

Love (Kiss)

Lily's companion recorded behaviour using one tick in this section, augmented once again by video evidence. Clear facial expressions were noted in reaction to the crescendi which built up to the three kisses. Over the time it took to build to the three kisses, Lily appeared to tune in to the action between the two actors. Her companion noted that 'she blew kisses' and the video evidence recorded her vocalising 'ba ba' noises, an important sound in her unique cultural library. I had observed Lily in a range of contexts using these noises in response to stimuli which she found pleasurable.

Happiness (Bollywood)

Lily responded positively to the happy feeling in the space during this section of the play, registering this through '*usually smiling*'. She reacted very positively to the sensation of the feather fan being brushed across her face. Again, '*she was looking at the lights*', turning her head upwards and responding pleasurably to the changes in light state. Lily registered the most obvious signs of pleasure when '*she played the musical instrument*'. Matt offered her a large tambourine and she took great delight in holding it in one hand and hitting it with the other hand. At the end of the Bollywood sequence, light, sound and action combined to focus the audience back on Sam while he brought the play to a close. The signals were: a gradual diminuendo in the music, the lighting state changing from coloured 'chasing' to a constant state, the giant peacock tail becoming still and Matt

removing his large drum (and himself) from the centre of the performing area. Lily had, up until that point, been enthusiastically playing the tambourine. The video supports the companion observation recording that Lily stopped almost instantly to watch and listen to Sam as he delivered his lines. This could indicate that she understood that the time for participation was over and that she needed to focus elsewhere. It could also mean that she responded to the stopping of the musical stimuli to which she had been contributing. Whatever the reason, the speed of her reaction was in contrast to the processing time displayed by Lily at other times during the play.

General observations

Lily's reliance on a companion to move her motorised chair made it difficult to assess the degree to which she actively chose to join her classmates in the micro-theatre. However, whilst following the accordion, her demeanour was sunny and positive. Lily's companion was a relative newcomer to the group and her knowledge of her unique cultural library was limited to fairly surface observations. The companion had only been present at one session, during which I had taught the case study students, and so I sensed a slight, and understandable, lack in confidence in comparison with the other companions. During teaching sessions when I had been working one-to-one with Lily, I noticed that she often took some time to process,

and react to, stimuli. I discussed this briefly with her companion at the end of the first performance and we agreed that any behaviours that were observed throughout the performance could well be time-delayed in relation to the stimuli that may have triggered them.

I would like to add my observations of Lily during the 'sad' moment in the play although no specific reactions were recorded by her companion. On the video recording, I observed her vocalising gently while Sam was snapping the twigs one at a time. She reacted to the moment when the music began playing with a broad smile and smiled again when Phoebe signalled 'sad' in Makaton in front of her. Her body language conveyed a sense of emotional engagement through eye contact and generally alert limb actions. Her companion corroborated with me afterwards that this had probably been triggered by the feeling of sadness in the micro-theatre although I do not have this comment recorded anywhere.

Performance Two

Specific observations

Lily's companion again recorded engagement with all four emotional moments in the play. Each moment was recorded using two ticks with one specific observed behaviour each for 'excitement', 'sadness' and 'love'. Three behaviours were recorded for 'happiness'.

Excitement (storm)

Lily's companion noted that she '*made some noises 'ba ba' ' during the storm. This was possibly Lily communicating her pleasure to her companion. I also noticed her eyes once again being drawn to the lighting rig during changes in light state. When there was the first loud thunder clap, the smile left Lily's face almost immediately and was replaced by a neutral expression. Her companion noted that 'She didn't make peacock noises this time.'*

Sadness (fallen tree)

Lily became quite physically active when she was moved out of the den into the space with the fallen tree. She was trying to grab her companion and her legs were also quite active. This may have been Lily communicating with her companion about something or it may have been a sign of distress. There is no record of her facial expression at this point. When Lily heard Sam crying, she became physically very still and was making gentle 'ba ba' noises. Her companion also recorded that '*[Lily] was making noises when Sam was crying and also when he went to the den.'*

Love (kiss)

In this section Lily's companion once again recorded that '*[She] was blowing kisses'*. I observed that as the crescendo of the final kiss began, Lily began to reach out with her arms and generally become more physically animated. Her 'ba ba' vocalisations were really clear and she was smiling. In addition to this she brought her blanket up to

cover her face and looked out from behind it. This may have been a reaction to this narrative moment or a random action.

Happiness (Bollywood)

Lily chose not to play the tambourine as recorded by her companion:

'She wasn't interested in playing any of the instrument[s] this time.'

She happily kept her eyes turned towards the lights and so had the full experience of their changing states and colours. Her companion also recorded *'[she was] watching the lights'*.

General observations

During the break, Lily's companion and I remarked how little reaching out and grabbing she had displayed. We had both noticed that this was her usual way of attracting the attention of people around her. We also agreed that she seemed to react very vocally to the first meeting between Sam and Phoebe. This manifested itself in a peacock-type cry which she repeated whilst clapping her hands. Lily had also been vocally active in the den, repeatedly lip-smacking in response to stimuli. Overall she seemed to register a positive experience of the play and this fits with Lily's general approach to new experiences, taking them in her stride and finding her own level within them.

Poppy

Performance One

Specific observations

This companion records engagement with all four moments of the play. 'Excitement' is recorded with three ticks and a description. 'Sadness' is recorded with four ticks and a description. 'Love' is recorded with a single tick and a description. 'Happiness' is recorded with two ticks and a description.

Excitement (storm)

The camera augmented the companion observation which recorded Poppy looking at the action when the sounds of the storm began. She did not appear to be either afraid or excited but did seem engaged. When the lights and sound effects became more intense she turned her body away from the action on her chair. Poppy entered the den with confidence. Her companion writes that '*[she] walked into [the] den. V. V calm. Watching. Lots of eye contact. Pushed Phoebe's arm to open the door.*'

Sadness (fallen tree)

This section was recorded using four ticks indicating extreme emotional involvement in this section. In support of this, the video recorded Poppy being very still whilst looking at Sam crying. She held her companion's hand for a while. When the sad music started, she turned around completely on her chair and sat for the remainder of the scene with her back to the action. Her companion records that '*[Poppy's] body moved backwards as if to move away from [the] emotion. [She] turned away. [She] wiped her hand [and] forearm*

over her face. Her picking on the chair became agitated.¹² [She] took ages to return.' In discussion after the first performance, Poppy's companion was sure that turning her back on the action was a result of her understanding that the emotion was a negative one and that Poppy either didn't want to witness it in Sam, or didn't want to feel it for herself.¹³

Love (kiss)

Poppy still appeared to be affected by the sad moment sitting with her back to the action but reacted by moving her right arm and rocking during the third kiss crescendo. According to her companion she was *'still turned away, picking at [the] chair but still listening.'*

Happiness (Bollywood)

Throughout most of this section, Poppy remained with her back to the action. She could be seen occasionally peeping over her right shoulder, clearly using her shoulder as a physical barrier between herself and the action. This may have been a way of protecting herself from negative emotion. This behaviour clearly changed when her companion showed her the photo of Sam and Phoebe looking happy. Her companion records that *'when Sam came over and showed [the] photo Poppy turned [her] body and head back to the action. [She gave a] brief smile.'* During the singing of the audience's names at the end of this section, Poppy left the micro-theatre briefly then returned smiling. She settled happily on the floor in the centre of the

¹² Poppy picked at the chair with her finger.

¹³ Recorded in my field journal.

performing area before enthusiastically following Matt and the accordion back to the classroom.

General observations

Both Poppy's companion and I remarked at how engaged she had been throughout the first performance. She was *'not phased by new people, new situation. V calm and still. (No pushing, shoving or biting).'* Poppy appeared to be very happy when first entering the den, which she expressed through smiling and vocalising. She seemed to make a connection with Sam, apparently wanting to be near him during the scene in the den. In terms of her engaging with the sensory stimuli, she particularly enjoyed throwing stones into the pond. She *'touched all [of the] objects. [She was] great with stones [and] water. [She was] very happy to come over to the pond. Really engaged.'* Back in the classroom afterwards, Poppy was extremely calm and relaxed, happily returning to the hall for the second performance.

Performance Two

Specific observations

The companion once again records engagement with all four moments of the play. 'Excitement' is recorded with three ticks and a description. 'Sadness' is recorded with four ticks and a description. 'Love' is

recorded with two ticks and a description. 'Happiness' is recorded with three ticks and a description.

Excitement (storm)

Throughout the storm itself, Poppy sat on the floor, which she flicked with her finger, independent of her companion. She showed no signs of distress. As the den was made, she sat gently rocking with a very 'open' expression on her face. At the moment of physical transition into the den, Poppy became slightly agitated, grabbing her companion and pushing her into the den. Her companion records that *Polly 'went into the space fine. [She] became agitated. [She was] vocal, grabbing [and] pushing.'*

Sadness (fallen tree)

On leaving the den, Poppy chose to lie down on the floor right next to the pile of twigs which signified the fallen tree. The video recorded her gently vocalising what may have been peacock sounds. This might have been a way of her choosing to actively engage with the sad action. As the twigs were being snapped she looked around at people and also at the floor, which she continued to pick at and flick. Her companion records that Poppy *'anticipated [and] jumped up just before [the] sad moment. [She] laid on [the] floor. [She was] v calm. When [there was the] sad part Poppy looked as if she were crying. She 3-4 times wiped her face with her t shirt.'* Poppy briefly looked at Sam and Phoebe whilst Phoebe was signing 'sad' in front of her.

Love (kiss)

Poppy seemed to be engrossed with the sensation of tapping on the floor but watched the build up to the first kiss, glancing back intermittently at the other two kisses. Her companion writes that *'[she] glimpsed up. [She] still remained lying on [the] floor tapping gently.'*

Happiness (Bollywood)

Poppy stood and danced from foot to foot. When Sam came over with the happy photo of himself and Phoebe, she moved towards it, making eye contact with him. She had a contented smiling expression, connecting with her companion through 'pulling' actions as she made full eye contact with the feather fan. As Matt approached with the big drum, she stood fully in front of him, engaging with the sound. As the piece ended she was moving freely and happily around the micro-theatre. Her companion writes that *'when [the] lights came up and Sam came over Poppy smiled. Once [the] music came on Poppy got up and swayed to [the] music smiling and vocalising gently. [She] walked over to Sam at [the] same point as before. Poppy left [the] space [and] returned straight away.'*

General observations

Poppy was extremely relaxed during the second performance, entering the micro-theatre with great enthusiasm. She faced the performing area for almost the entire play and, at times, seemed to physically place herself in the centre of the action. The video recorded

her making gentle peacock noises during the garden sensory activities. At the beginning, Poppy's companion noted *'at [the] start when [the] names [were] called, Poppy smiled. At Ash's name she smiled at Ash.'* Similarly at the end of the performance when she heard Bud's name being sung *'she walked over and touched him.'* The video recorded that Poppy may have said her name very softly as the introduction was played to the name-singing section at the end. More generally Poppy's companion writes: *'I thought the performance was brilliant. For Poppy to remain calm and engaged for over two hours is unheard of. [During] both breaks back at class Poppy [was] calm and quiet. I did not need any calming props throughout [the] two performances.'*

Rose

Performance One

Specific observations

Rose's companion recorded engagement with three out of four emotional moments of the play. 'Excitement' and 'sadness' were recorded using one tick and a description. 'Happiness' was recorded using two ticks and a description.

Excitement (storm)

The camera captured Rose's very clear reaction to the sounds of the storm as she sat up with energy, especially when the 'chaos' musical theme began. Up until that point she had been lying, seemingly

passively, with her head on a piece of turf. It would seem that the strength of the stimulus also caused some agitation as was also noted by her companion. *'Rose moved and listened to the sound of the storm, reaching out for reassurance'*.

Sadness (fallen tree)

Rose really seemed to be listening intently when Sam was snapping the twigs. She was slumped forward on her bean-bag towards her companion. *'[Rose] wanted me to hold her hand and she sat quite close.'* I observed her being very focused when Sam was crying, holding her stone very still in the palm of her hand.

Happiness (Bollywood)

Rose was alert and participating during this section of the play, holding both the large and small drum which Matt offered her. Her exploration of the drums was carried out with her sitting upright and included some rhythmic tapping. Her companion recorded that *'[the] drum [that] she was given she touched and tapped'*.

General observations

Rose's subtle communication meant that it was extremely important that the companion allocated to her was experienced in interpreting her unique cultural library. We recognised that there would need to be sufficient time for her to choose where to be, and when to move, once she was inside the micro-theatre and the play had started. Rose's visual impairment meant that she would be unable to register any reaction to visual stimuli.

She happily followed Matt into the hall from the classroom but seemed disorientated and insecure once inside the micro-theatre. This manifested itself in resistance to choosing where, and how, to sit. Once seated, her discomfort continued for a while as recorded by her companion: *'Rose was cross at the start but seemed to calm really quickly as [she was] handed objects to touch and the story carried on.'* It became clear that Rose would need haptic stimulus if she was to feel comfortable. She especially enjoyed experiencing the wet pebbles from Sam's pond and much of her subsequent engagement with the play took place with pebbles either in her hands or nearby.

Performance Two

Specific observations

Rose's companion recorded engagement with all four emotional moments of the play. In each category there was a significant increase in the level of engagement. 'Excitement', 'sadness' and 'happiness' were recorded using three ticks and a description. 'Love' was recorded using one tick and a description.

Excitement (storm)

No video-recorded evidence was available to support the observations made by Rose's companion who wrote *'her head was moving and [she was] showing she was listening.'*

Sadness (fallen tree)

Having repeatedly reviewed the video evidence it was still almost impossible to assess Rose's level of engagement and I needed to rely on the companion's clear recording that this was a 'three tick' moment. Her companion recorded that '*she kept tapping her knee, [she was] a bit agitated.*' The knee tapping was captured on video. This may have indicated that Rose was aware of the sadness of Sam's situation and that this was the cause of her agitation. It may also have indicated that she was agitated for some reason unconnected with the specific moment of narrative.

Love (kiss)

The one tick recorded by Rose's companion indicates a greater level of engagement than during this moment in the first performance when no tick was given. Her companion simply wrote; '*listened*'. The video evidence shows Rose alert and quietly interacting with some objects from the den. Overall, during the second half of the play, it is difficult to tell if Rose was reacting to the aural stimuli surrounding her or the haptic stimulus of the objects which she so enjoyed handling.

Throughout the kiss sequence Rose could be heard gently vocalising.

Happiness (Bollywood)

According to her companion, Rose experienced this section of the play through her interactions with an object. This time it was the large drum offered to her by Matt. The noise it made appeared to trigger enjoyment in Rose and according to her companion '*[Rose] enjoyed*

the music [and] the tapping of the drum. She tapped it herself and felt around the drum.'

General observations

Over break, we felt that the effort involved in moving around the micro-theatre may have been a source of physical stress for Rose and that it would probably be advantageous for her to experience the second performance from her wheelchair. Rose was likely to be tired as a result of being involved in the first performance and we agreed that it would be less exhausting for her to remain seated. This conversation took place in the presence of Rose, and her companion assured me that she was giving tacit agreement for this to happen. She seemed more relaxed on arrival in the micro-theatre and, because she had both hands free as a result of not having to support her weight on the floor, was able to explore more thoroughly the tactile stimuli on offer. Rose showed signs, as recorded by her companion, of recognising that she was experiencing something for the second time: *'as [she k]new the story, she recognised the peacock sound and smiled when she heard this.'*

General reflections from my field journal

In addition to the student-specific observations recorded above, I recorded more general reflection in my field journal. These personal reflections are reproduced in Figures 13(a) and 13(b). These reflections would conjoin with the evidence gathered from my case-

study group and be taken forward to inform the analysis of *White Peacock*.

The observations recorded in this chapter and the insights emerging from them are at the core of my research. Having outlined the notion of performing twice, and the data-gathering methodology which enabled me to record the experiences of Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose, I then reproduced as full a record as possible of their experience as a first-time audience, specifically their engagement in the emotional narrative. This record was followed by observations from my field journal. These data enabled me to develop my thinking, explained in the next chapter, concerning the effectiveness of the framing constructs in enabling ethically safe emotional passage through the key theatrical narrative elements in the piece. I will go on to examine if it had been possible for the case-study group to distinguish between enacted emotions and real emotions. Through analysing the play, I will position new insights against current theoretical discourse for the purpose of creating a model for regional producing houses and individual theatre-makers working in this field.

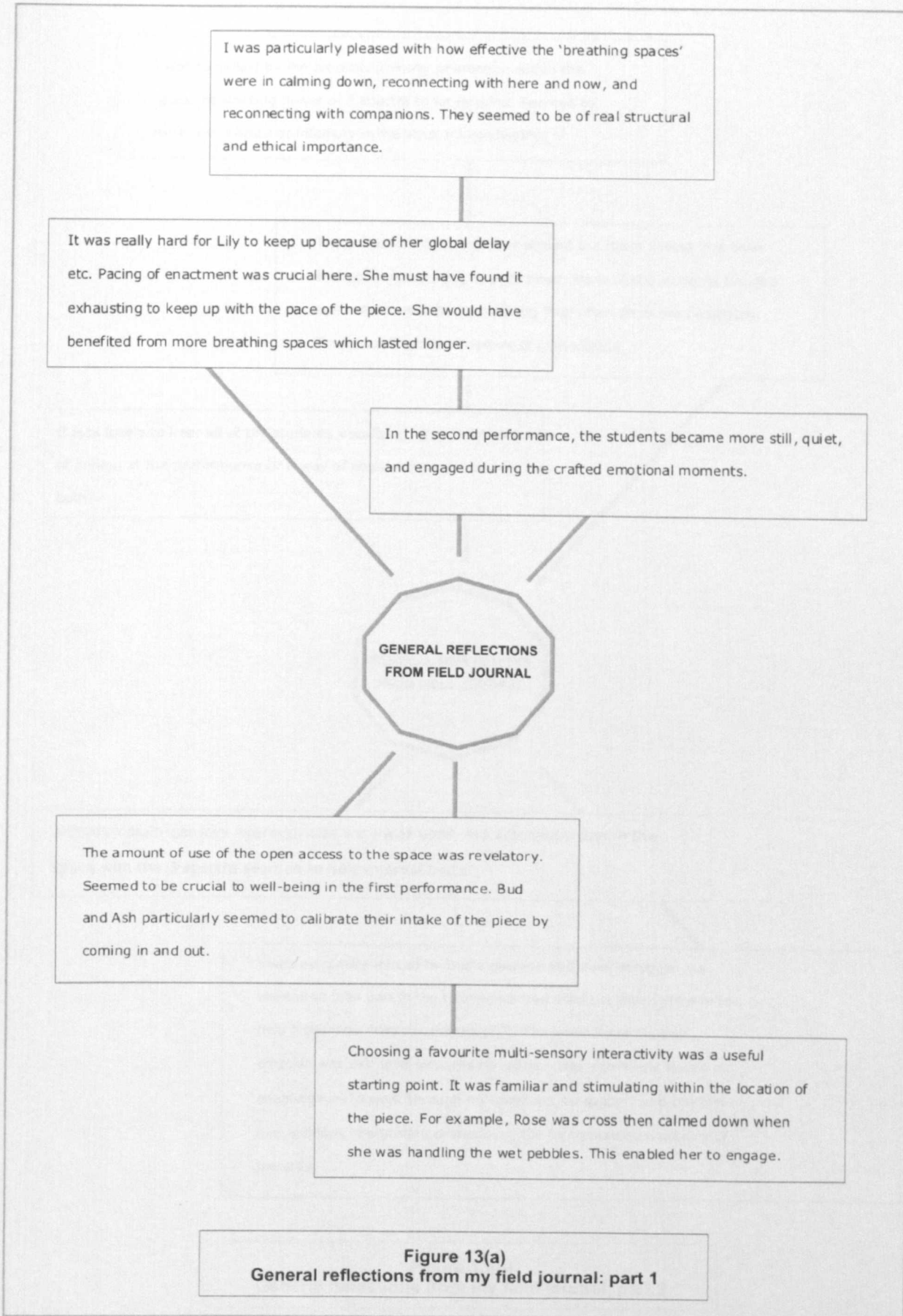


Figure 13(a)
General reflections from my field journal: part 1

I was surprised by the amount/intensity of emotion within the space, reinforcing power of 3 spectra to foreground. Seemed to work with particular intensity in the black micro-theatre.

There was lots of eye contact around the space during first song. Everyone was looking at each other. None of the students avoided eye contact, which is something they often do in the classroom. There was a sense of openness in the space.

It was lovely to hear all of the students vocalising. Was this a way of joining-in the performance or a way of registering emotion, or both?

**GENERAL REFLECTIONS
FROM FIELD JOURNAL**

Although multi-sensory interactivities were well used, the actor/musician in the space with the 3 spectra seemed to hold interest better.

I was extremely moved by Bud's courage and inner struggle. He wanted to take part in the experience and used the micro-theatre to help him (outer frame construction?). The intensity of his own emotion was extraordinary. His companion was extremely skilled in enabling him to work through his emotions, to support and comfort him, without interpreting or modeling the foregrounded emotions of the play.

Figure 13(b)
General reflections from my field journal: part 2

Chapter Six

White Peacock: Part 3.

Reflecting on Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose's experiences in the light of the frames created in and around the play.

Guidelines for future PMLD theatre-making.

Jasmine whirls around the space with a peacock feather which she sniffs, chews and crushes in a repeated sequence. Lesley is sitting on a bean-bag some distance away. A full-scale Bollywood celebration is taking place inside the micro-theatre. The space is filled with light, sound and action. The actors dance, the musician sings and plays a drum. The audience members do likewise.

Jasmine:

I felt really scared being in the theatre so I kept going in and out. Then we had a drink and a biscuit in Green Classroom. Then the man came and played his box again. Then I came back to the theatre and stayed inside it. Then I was a bit scared. Then I was excited. Then I was sad. Now I am happy.

Lesley moves towards the entrance to collect Jasmine's wheelchair. Jasmine runs and grabs Lesley's hand, pulling her back into the micro-theatre. They dance.

In this chapter, I assess the evidence recorded in Chapter Five and consider to what extent the three spectra strategies explored in *Harry and Tree*, along with the application of Bennett's outer and inner frames within *White Peacock*, enabled Bud, Ash, Lily, Poppy and Rose to be emotionally engaged within a safe ethical framework as members of an audience. In order to do this, I return to the theoretical discourse explored in Chapters One and Two in the light of observations recorded during two performances of *White Peacock*. Simplifying Bennett's theory of the relationship between outer and inner frames for the purposes of analysis, I demarcate the full theatre-going experience into three distinct structural territories: outer frame, frame convergence and inner frame. Through a detailed examination, I draw out threads from the case-study students which highlight new insights, specifically the notions of 'events' and 'breathing spaces', which I position against the work of key theoreticians. I explore the utility of repeating the performance and posit this as being vitally important in the construction of frames and safe engagement with the events contained therein. From this examination, I create a set of recommendations that have two parts. The first puts forward three foundational principles which, I argue, should underpin future theatre-making for PMLD audiences. The second is a set of practical guidelines written using the fictitious voice of Jasmine, in which the foundational principles are embedded, and

which summarise the research journey I have undertaken. The chapter ends with a general conclusion to the thesis.

White Peacock was extremely well received by my case-study group and their companions. The engagement of the students was intense and, at times, emotional, as recorded in Chapter Five. However, in this chapter, I will not systematically analyse the reactions of each particular student in order to create a body of irrefutable evidence, as I believe their emotional engagements are rooted in two unique performances on a specific day with a particular alchemy within the micro-theatre. Their recorded behaviours will, however, appear as supporting observations to enable a theoretical framework to be constructed that will, I hope, encourage practitioners to create new performances with their own particular alchemies.

Outer Frame

Key to the case-study students accessing *White Peacock* was the provision of robustly constructed elements of a cultural outer frame, which they were unlikely to have acquired, or required, up until this point. My working in the school prior to case-study day may have contributed to their outer frame, but the purpose of these visits had primarily been to prepare the students for their involvement in a research project, not to provide a cultural initiation. Using the non-residency model required that the features of the outer frame needed

to be clearly present, and accessible to the students, on the day of the performances.

Thus, the creation of an outer frame, and the beginning of Blau's 'history', started in the classroom. This began with the unobtrusive arrival of the musician who invited the students to journey to the hall with him, leading them through the school, with accordion accompaniment, to the micro-theatre. There was a range of reference points here to ease the students towards the theatre: the musician himself, his accordion and the music it produced. This activity used a single musical theme from the play, thereby linking the familiar world of the classroom with the unfamiliar world of the micro-theatre. The presence of the music, and perhaps more importantly the musician, moved the audience from the 'here and now' into the potentiality of the 'there and then'. This journey began with the *unfamiliar* presence of music played by a stranger within the *familiar* setting of the classroom. There was then a subtle transformation, which took place throughout the duration of the journey. The stranger and the music became a friendly, *familiar* presence offering security within the *unfamiliar* cultural space of the micro-theatre. This transformation was not consciously constructed as part of the directing process which I applied to the play itself, but its careful execution was key to igniting curiosity and encouraging the confidence to follow the sound. It was an evolution that took place through an unforced placing of trust by the audience in the music and the musician.

The journey was a valuable part of the means by which we constructed an identifiable outer frame for the performance, tapping into music as 'a very powerful, magical, tool for setting the mood and for communication'.¹ This was evident from the enthusiasm with which my case-study students followed the musician and the music before the second performance, suggesting that they understood the musical journey would lead to the place inside the hall where there would be a story about a white peacock.

The constructed environment of the micro-theatre in the school created a demarcated space within which the performance would unfold, and I suggest it was the single most important component of the outer frame. Bennett alludes to the power of theatre architecture to 'over-code' performance.² She suggests that theatre architecture can be at odds with the emancipation of the spectator by ideologically encoding the experience to maintain, rather than disrupt, the dominant discourse. In contrast, I would suggest that the specific theatre architecture of *White Peacock* neither maintained nor disrupted the discourse, but *created* it.

Our micro-theatre was erected within the much larger school hall, a space the students already associated with socio-cultural gatherings such as assemblies and film screenings. In *Signs of Performance*, Counsell states that theatre discourse 'operates within given cultural *spaces* [] – sites wherein distinct species of social

¹ Runswick-Cole and Goodley, 2009, p. 28.

² Bennett, p. 129.

relationships already operate'.³ The students had experienced social behaviours associated with the cultural space of their school hall and, as a result, had a generalised (although not theatre-specific) horizon of expectations which had been pre-constructed.

Rather than the architecture of the school hall 'over-coding' the experience provided within it, I would suggest that its familiarity *facilitated* access to the experience that took place within the micro-theatre. Specifically, I would argue that it was the encouragement of free movement by the audience between the two spaces, which enabled the outer frame to evolve. Nicholson writes that 'Place, perhaps most associated with stability, rootedness and belonging, also offers an imaginative way of understanding and perceiving the world'.⁴ So within the stable and rooted place of the school hall lay the space within which new understandings could be 'rendered theatricalizable'.⁵ To move between the two was emancipatory and transformative, in that the audience could choose to enter and leave the micro-theatre. Ash, Bud and Poppy made full use of this capacity to come and go in order to connect with the worlds outside, and inside, the micro-theatre, appearing to learn, across the repeated performances, that it was a place where they could experience a story, actors, lights, sound and objects to feel.

³ Counsell, p. 7.

⁴ Helen Nicholson, *Theatre and Education* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), p. 62.

⁵ Ubersfeld, p. 98.

Bennett's notion of over-coding is a useful construct, in that the architecture of the hall pointed out the difference between itself and the performative space. I argue that the case-study students needed to have free access to both the real world and the place where a different reality would be enacted and they understood this difference through their juxtaposition. This freedom of access, and its enablement by the companions, was an important step towards the attainment of 'free participation in cultural life and the arts' as stated in Article 31.

Frame Convergence

In *Theatre Audiences*, Bennett assumes that the presence of 'cultural competence' enables the spectator to enter the world of the fiction.⁶ I believed that, to enable audience access to the different reality of the inner frame, the signifiers needed to be very robust to create a clear demarcation between fiction and reality. An emotional experience without a clear outer cultural frame could be mistaken for a *real* emotional experience by learning disabled audiences. This would be a manipulative and unethical outcome.

In writing about Theatre in Education, Anthony Jackson states that 'There are perhaps few worse experiences in this field of work than to find oneself belittled or one's dignity undermined within a

⁶ Pearson and Shanks, p. 56.

supposedly participatory event from which there is no ready escape.⁷ This is extremely apposite in the case of PMLD audiences, and the performers were key in communicating to the audience that the two permanently visible entrances to the micro-theatre were free to be used as often as necessary. This was particularly important for the companions, whose horizon of expectations prior to attending *White Peacock* were based on their own experience of non-PMLD theatre-going with its largely static audience arrangement. The empowering process of enabling audience members to come and go as they pleased seemed to be an emancipatory component of the convergence and was well used by all of the case study students and their companions.

A further important feature of the frame convergence was the welcoming behaviour of the actors, and the use of 'everyvoice' whilst the audience entered the micro-theatre. As this process took place, certain features external to the fiction, such as the live accordion music, and the performers introducing themselves using their own names whilst describing themselves as actors, were still in place. Throughout this time the team worked to create a sense of physical and social comfort, enabling the audience to choose where and how to sit. These interactions were carried out through a three-way negotiated process of questioning, involving the performer, the companion and the audience member, in order to share elements of

⁷ Anthony Jackson, *Theatre, Education and the Making of Meanings: Art or Instrument?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007), p. 8.

the individual unique cultural library. Emphasis was placed on encouraging the companions to enable the students to experience the fiction for themselves. The performing team offered an invitation to join a temporary community, which would exist for the duration of the play, and in writing about this notion of invitation, Heather Lilley outlines the important role of the performer in navigating frame convergence:

Performers must ask audience members to enter into a relationship that is played out on two levels: partly in the real world, in which actors and spectators share space and time that is marked by a number of accepted boundaries; and partly in the imaginary world of the play where the only boundary is a potential reluctance to enter into a temporary state of participation and acknowledged contribution to the event.⁸

The frame convergence demonstrated in the Prologue of the script was managed with precision by the performers, mindful that such boundary demarcation, for this audience, was a new experience. This was the moment of cognitive division, where the connection with the outside world diminished, and the connection with the fictional world began. I believe that this was the first moment of intersection of the two frames and that the willingness of the students to engage with the fictional world was reliant on the newly forged cultural outer

⁸ Heather Lilley, 'Vital Contact: Community and Negotiations of Audience Performance Relationships in the Theatre of Cartoon de Salvo, Kneehigh Theatre and Northern Stage' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Nottingham, 2005), p. 165.

frame. When the actors, as *characters*, sang the names of the audience members, an invitation into the story was procured. Pfister describes this change from outer to inner frame as a shift in 'weight' within the theatre space:

there is an element of qualitative and functional tension that is always 'weighted' differently towards either the physical stage area or the fictional locale.⁹

The use of song, sung with complicated harmonies and rhythms, using the names of the students, changed the weight within the space, and marked out to the audience members that this was especially for them in this place at this time and that 'something was beginning'. The composer created a sense of portentousness through the music, signifying that a moment of change was in progress. I supported this shift in weight by continuing to create gentle adjustments within the space. There were changes in light state and scenic features. At this moment the actor who would be playing Sam did all he could 'to make himself observed standing between the spectator and the event' as he began to construct the 'portable territory' of his role by speaking the words of his character.¹⁰ This was the moment when the hierarchised three spectra moved to the fore and the space became charged, adding the inner frame to the outer frame.

⁹ Pfister, p. 22.

¹⁰ Brecht, p. 58. Pearson and Shanks, p. 19.

Inner Frame

The inner frame was the container within which the narrative structure sat. As argued in Chapter Two, I felt it was important to retain a clear sense of story within *White Peacock* for two reasons. Firstly, I chose to present the plot logically because of the multiplicity of audiences who would be experiencing *White Peacock* and the recognition that all 'human beings are storying creatures'.¹¹ I had observed the teachers at Oak Field using story within their teaching, framing narratives within a beginning, middle and end structure, keeping the order of the stories fixed. Throughout the performance, the actors, teachers and companions used the PECS symbols and Makaton signs to support the audience in accessing the story.

Secondly, as an educator, I felt it was important to support the PMLD student's development in using narrative to make sense of the world. Jerome Bruner has written extensively about the importance of narrative with specific regard to educative processes and acknowledges that this acquisition of storying is developmental in nature:

We frame the accounts of our cultural origins and our most cherished beliefs in story form, and it is not just the 'content' of these stories that grip us but their narrative artifice.¹²

¹¹ Pat Sykes and Ken Gale, *Narrative Approaches to Education Research* (Plymouth: University of Plymouth, Faculty of Education, 2006), p.1.

¹² Jerome Seymour Bruner, *The Culture of Education* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 40.

Thus it was through the audience joining the actor's portable storytelling territory that they inhabited the inner frame. Reflecting on children attending a play, Schonmann observes that 'the children's aesthetic enjoyment lies in the hands of the actors' ability to communicate with the child and with the fiction' and the character of Sam began the play by directly addressing the audience and informing its members that what is about to unfold is a story.¹³ Sam's exposition followed, leading us into the first event of the play. Because the plot was only a section of the wider story of Sam, there were certain life experiences and circumstances that he needed to bring with him to the play and he began the plot expositionally, explaining why the location of the garden was important to him. My hope was that, as the play unfolded, the garden would also become important to the audience. The notion of exposition caused me a degree of uncertainty as the maker of the piece. It was unlikely that my case-study group would understand Sam's story beyond the plot. Spencer defines story as 'what happens both onstage and offstage – before the play begins, after it ends, and everything that happens concurrent to it but which we don't happen to see'.¹⁴ Everything, in fact, that a PMLD audience may not be able to grasp. However, *White Peacock* needed to speak to heterogeneous, multi-polarised audiences across its lifetime and 'multiple readings' were to be encouraged.¹⁵

¹³ Schonmann, p. 89.

¹⁴ Spencer, p. 215.

¹⁵ Bennett, p. viii.

The expositional first event was also important in that it put in place a number of components contributing to the robust structure of the inner frame. Through their first encounter with Sam, the audience members were introduced to the garden, the peacock, the birds, and the moon through a range of sensory stimuli. His method of communicating with the audience was honest, direct and friendly. He also set up an important convention at this early stage in the play as he triggered the change of physical features within the micro-theatre and communicated to the audience that this is a space not only where people would talk but also where things would happen. They were encouraged to understand how the play, and thus the inner frame, would work as the plot unfolded.

Plot

In his exploration of time and space within play structures, Pfister describes them as 'the horizontal axis of succession' and 'the vertical axis of simultaneity'.¹⁶ Emplotment through time was the predominant structure I used throughout *White Peacock*, reflecting the simple narrative artifice required for a PMLD audience. The play, set in the present, was structured as a series of events happening in chronological order across the time scale of a summer's night. For Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose, at an early point in their development as storying beings, this horizontally constructed plot,

¹⁶ Pfister, p. 276.

with one event following another in chronological order, was likely to be more cognitively accessible than one constructed vertically. This is because the latter would require them to understand that 'a number of different situations, actions or events coincide to make up the dramatic action'.¹⁷ This type of simultaneous structure would demand a high degree of cognitive function from the target PMLD audience and it was unlikely that they would be able to create meaning from such complex emplotment of the story. To use vertical space emplotment within the piece would have required sub-plots, with our actors playing multiple characters and potentially inhabiting multiple locations. Thus, to best facilitate understanding and to lessen the decoding demands on the audience, I chose to focus, through horizontal time emplotment, on two characters functioning in one place, moving from the beginning of the story to the end.

In overall terms, the plot of the play moved towards Sam finding a girlfriend and celebrating this achievement. Here the idea of the supertask, first explored in Konstantin Stanislavski's early twentieth-century development of acting practice, provides a useful lens through which to view Sam's quest. Stanislavski writes:

Everything that happens in a play, all of its individual 'tasks', major or minor, all the actor's creative ideas and actions, which are analogous to the role, strive to fulfill the play's Supertask.¹⁸

¹⁷ Pfister, p. 276.

¹⁸ Konstantin Stanislavski, *An Actor's Work*, trans. Jean Benedetti (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), p. 307.

The presence of this Supertask drove the events of *White Peacock* forward and culminated in the celebration. The inevitable progression of the characters towards this is, of course, legible to those in the audience who can be cognisant of it, but the culmination of the Supertask can still be engaging without the knowledge of that progression. Lily, for example, accessed the attainment of the Supertask when Sam and Phoebe kiss, marking an emotional crescendo in the plot. This could be seen through her visual focus and smiling. I crafted the kiss event to highlight their desire by repeating it three times with the crescendo building to a greater intensity with each repetition. The crescendi were achieved through the three spectra, via music, volume of sound and increase in light state to support the work of the actors. This repetition of the crescendi created a sense of anticipation, and although the students may have had no awareness of the circumstantial pressures on Sam, who was returning to school the following day, they could remain active emotional spectators in his 'big moment', as seen in Lily's smile and vocalisations.

Location

Creating a strong and clear location within the micro-theatre was key to PMLD audiences being able to separate the 'nowness' of the real world with the 'thereness' of the plot. I borrow here from Manfred Wekwerth's work within the context of early twentieth-century

theatre theory. From his position within Brecht's Berliner Ensemble, he records that 'the stage designers, composers and the dramaturgs worked together from the outset on the scenic realisation of the story'.¹⁹ This was certainly the case with *White Peacock* and collaboration with Nottingham Playhouse enabled me to tackle the complex challenge of how to enable the PMLD audiences to access a sense of place through haptic routes, with real objects, whilst at the same time facilitating their cultural understanding that this haptic reality was within a fiction.

My choice of location was informed by the notion that 'understanding' should begin with the potential for embodied sensation rather than a space which requires intellectual interpretation of index, icon or symbol. Choosing a garden as a location provided me with a broad palette of sensory opportunities and thus potential access points into the plot.

Selden writes that 'the scent of flowers, the taste of food, the touch of a hand, all these make an impression on the mind and all stir the automatic system into a response, involving at least a minimum of emotion.'²⁰ My decision to set the entire piece in a garden, albeit with the creation of a den within it, was entirely informed by the needs of the PMLD audience and their need to experience Schechner's 'joining the outside to the inside'.²¹ In order

¹⁹ Russell, E. Brown, 'Berthold Brecht as Dramaturg', in Cardullo, p. 62.

²⁰ Samuel Selden, *The Stage in Action* (London: Feffer and Simons, 1967), p. 282.

²¹ Schechner in Banes and Lepecki, p. 13.

for the audience to understand the importance of the garden to Sam, they needed to be able to experience it through as many senses, and for as long a time, as possible. As can be seen from Chapter Five, all of the students interacted fully with the garden. If the garden was important to Sam, it needed to be important to *them*. If it was important to them, it would help them to understand Sam's devastation when his tree blew down in the storm. Integral to the ability of the audience to access 'garden' was the need to make it truly interactive. The pond needed to have real cold water, the stones around it needed to be real stones and so on. Thus the signifier and the signified were one and the same. The objects, for members of the audience such as Rose, became the primary means to her understanding the location of the plot. In addition, the pond carried indexical meanings such as playfulness, adventure and exploration, available to those members of the audience who were able to access the play on this additional level.

Alluding to the importance of outdoor spaces in dramaturgy, David Edgar writes that 'the idea of the outside as a special, magic place has anthropological justification'.²² Outdoor spaces have a liminality to them, seen as being controlled by forces beyond human control. Hence I chose to create a den for Sam, a place from which the audience and the characters could experience the outside, wild

²² David Edgar, *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 75.

world of the garden during the storm. During this event, Sam and Phoebe were in conflict with the elements and, to some degree, with each other, as she wanted to stay outside and he wanted to seek shelter. The three spectra of light, sound and action supported the intensity of Sam's need to find shelter through the inclusion of thunder claps, lightning flashes and the 'chaos' musical theme. This transcodification in its signification of 'storm' strongly supported the inner frame, but more importantly provided fundamental reinforcement of the outer frame. In other words, the light, sound and action were made to feel 'differently real' when operating in juxtaposition with the visible construction of the den in the presence of the audience. This signified that that they were not *really* in the midst of a storm. Lily displayed visible signs of intense concentration at this point which may have indicated that she was 'taking in' this juxtapositional moment. Everyone was invited to enter the calmness of the den, away from the wilderness of the garden and the event was brought to a moment of resolution. This is an example of the importance of outer frame in supporting the 'as if ' construct of the inner frame, with the events that the audience were witnessing being 'mediated and intentional' within a specific location.

Events

Having discussed the decision to emplot horizontally by time, and within a location that lent itself to multi-sensory exploration, I will

now examine how I dissected the plot into fixed events and suggest how this strengthened the inner/outer frame intersection. As we have seen in the preceding chapters I created five events, charged with specific and intense emotions, to carry the plot for the audience. These events were: the argument, the storm, the tree, the kiss and Sam's celebration. With the exception of the first event, these formed the core of my data gathering as recorded fully in Chapter Five.

Spencer would define these as 'uber-actions', combining fulfillment and resolution, thus making them more likely to have significant emotional impact on the audience. While Spencer suggests that a dramaturgical event is both the achievement of a single goal and 'also a thing of the mind' and that in the best crafted plays the event is never simplistic, I argue that my case-study group needed to experience *exactly* that singularity and that they were unlikely to access the 'thing of the mind'.²³ Spencer describes this simplicity as 'too limiting, too reductive', but for the case-study group, I suggest that clearly defined and simply presented events were a pre-requisite for meaning-making. In his urging of playwrights to write events in a way that moves beyond limit and reduction, he encourages cognitive acts of inference that simply may not be possible, relying as they do, on signification systems functioning in a complex and multi-layered manner. I believe this complexity was unattainable for Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose who, I argue, required a simple series of events.

²³ Spencer, p. 88.

It is a simplicity that Counsell points to in his reflections on Brecht's use of events to maintain clarity of plot: 'Episodic scenes are complete in themselves, set in one location with a single collection of characters and essentially deal with one issue and event'.²⁴ This is how I structured *White Peacock*, although my rationale for doing so fundamentally differed from that of Brecht. He aimed to provoke a dialectic in the audience requiring that a distanced logic was brought to bear in order for one self-contained event to be juxtaposed with another. The purpose of this was to enable emotional objectification and ultimately politicisation. The use of self-contained events for my case-study group had the opposite objective. Their purpose was to draw the audience *towards*, rather than distance them from, the emotionality of the plot. If Brecht wanted his theatre to 'arouse the audience to think', I wanted my theatre to arouse the audience to 'feel'.²⁵ Key to this arousal was the use of the three spectra within the five dramaturgical events and I draw on a useful analogy from Greig to illustrate further.

Greig uses the metaphor of a washing-line to describe the relative size of events as they unfold within a plot:

The washing line image is useful, in that it will have items of different sizes hanging from it. Some of your events will be

²⁴ Counsell, p. 82.

²⁵ Brecht, p. 79.

huge and bed-sheet sized (death of a loved one) [] or a handkerchief (enjoying a particular film).²⁶

This is of structural relevance to *White Peacock* where I used the three spectra to create events that were all 'bed-sheet sized'. Reflecting on the responses of the case-study students to these events, especially those of Bud, Ash and Poppy, I believe there was sufficient signifiatory power within the three spectra to enable these emotional narrative events to be foregrounded, and to enable the students to disattend extraneous and distracting stimuli.

The decision to make all the events bed-sheet sized was, in part, to take into account the challenge to some PMLD audience members in being able to hold Welton's 'pictures in the head'. I feared that smaller 'pictures', carrying less emotional significance, would not be retained as a result of limited short-term memory.²⁷ For example, in *White Peacock*, engagement with the fallen tree moment was as important as Sam and Phoebe's kiss. It did not matter if the former contributed to the latter to anyone other than the actors playing Sam and Phoebe. These sheets were, in effect, chunks of intense signification, designed to embody a state of 'affective corporeality' and to trap the audience in the moment.²⁸ Semiotically, the effectiveness of the signs within the events depended on easy recognition of dominant signifiers that were not dependent on

²⁶ Greig, p. 73.

²⁷ Welton in Lepecki and Banes, p. 24

²⁸ States, p. 23.

support by, or cross-reference to, other signifiers within other events to create their meaning. Pfister writes that 'the present tense used in the fictional text reflects the real present of the audience' and I believed that each event needed to have a clear sense of 'nowness' in order that those members of the audience for whom short-term memory loss was an issue, could remain engaged.²⁹

Each event required sufficient stand-alone power to engage the audience, forming a *series* of emotional crescendi. I reproduce here, as Figures 14(a) and 14(b), four Venn diagrams which illustrate the way I used the three spectra within the events to create emotional engagement. The circles represent the three spectra, and the areas of intersection are where two or more of the spectra were operating together. 'Excitement' and 'Happiness' had 'dispersed emotional energy'. This means that the spectra were used centrifugally, filling the entire space with sound, light and action to create generalised feeling states. This dispersal of emotion had the additional opportunity for kinaesthetic engagement because the performers were moving around the space and encouraging the audience to do the same. In contrast, 'Sadness' and 'Love' had 'focused emotional energy', where the audience was drawn centripetally towards performed moments using tightly targeted sound, light and action. These two events invited the audience to engage through a state of

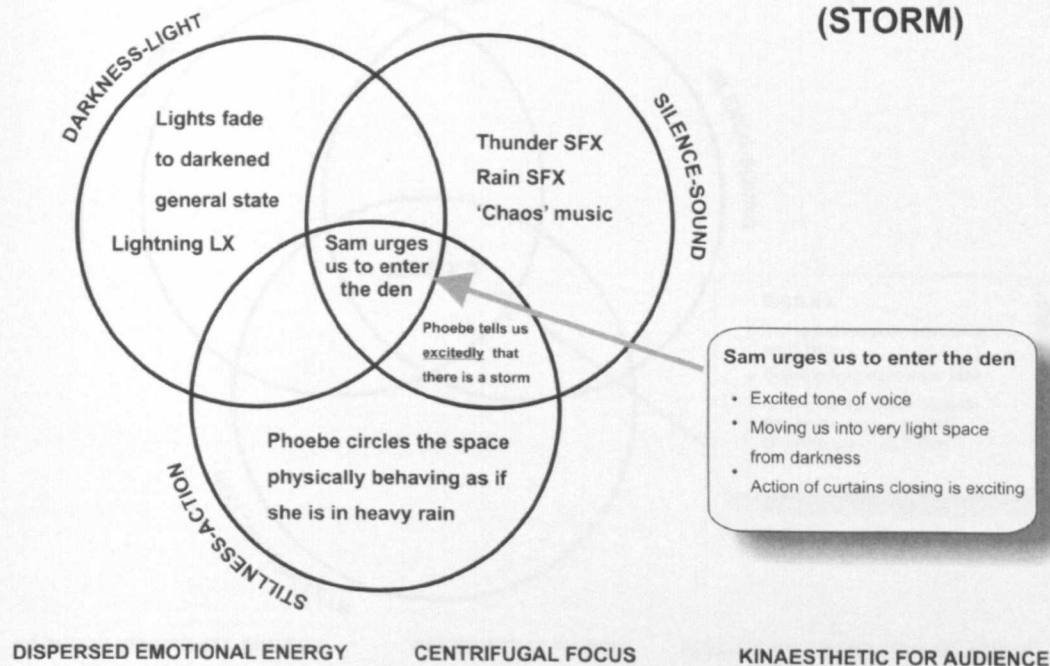
²⁹ Pfister, p. 275.

active empathy in reaction to singular dramatic moments enacted by the performers.

My observations were that both of these emotional energy types had the capacity to engage the audience, as is recorded in the previous chapter, with the students, in all cases, accessing the events with more focus during the second performance. These Venn diagrams, presented in chronological order, are a schematisation of how those engagements were achieved.

Key:
LX = Lighting Effects
SXF = Sound Effects

EXCITEMENT (STORM)



SADNESS (FALLEN TREE)

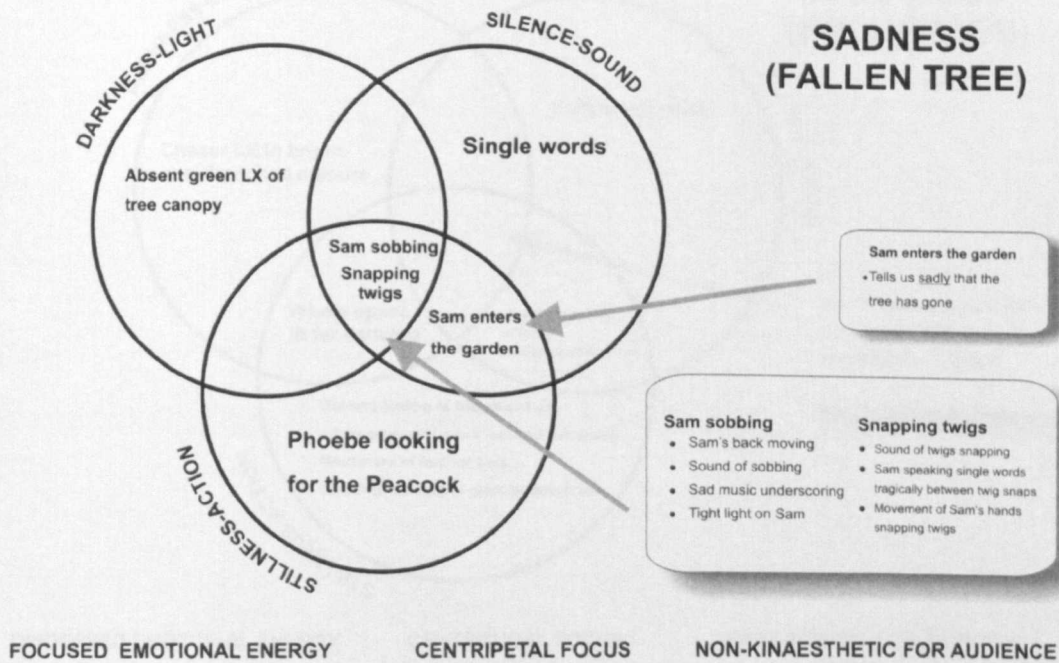
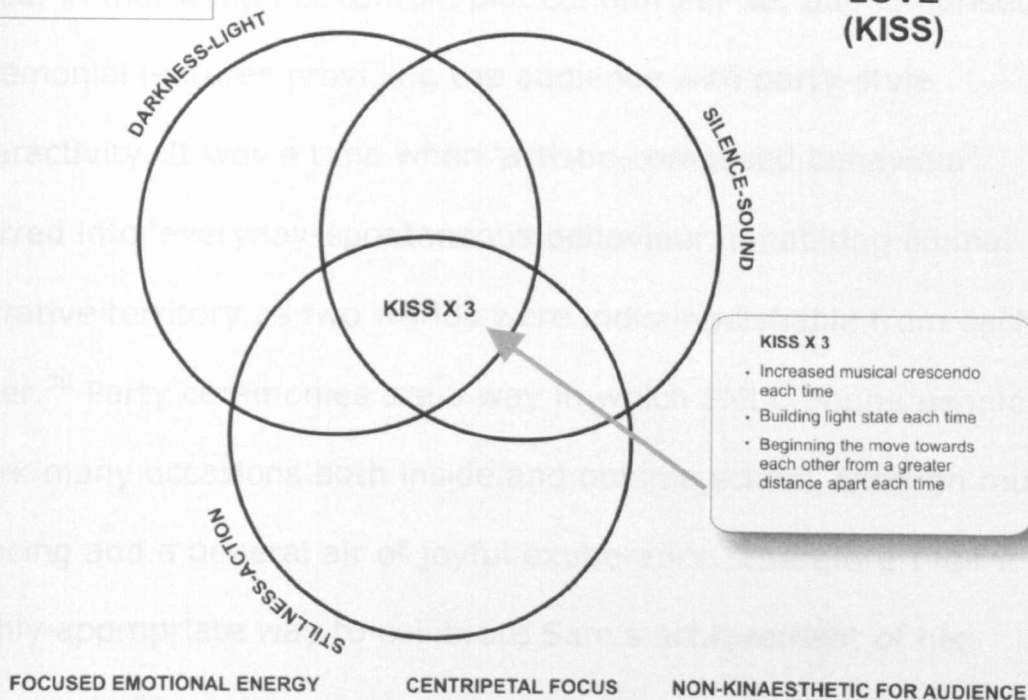


Figure 14 (a)
Events: part 1

Key:
LX = Lighting Effects
SXF = Sound Effects

LOVE (KISS)



HAPPINESS (BOLLYWOOD)

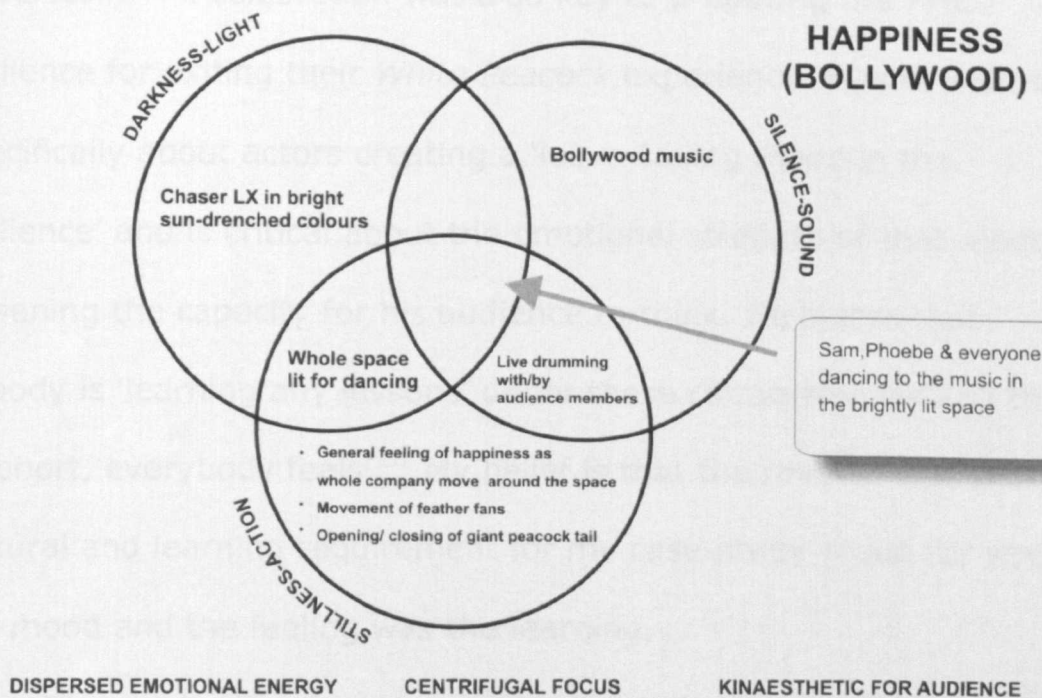


Figure 14 (b)
Events: part 2

The 'Happiness' event was qualitatively different to the other three, in that it did not contain plot content *per se*, but comprised ceremonial features providing the audience with party-style interactivity. It was a time when 'artistic-composed behaviour' blurred into 'everyday-spontaneous behaviour' inhabiting liminal narrative territory as two worlds were indistinguishable from each other.³⁰ Party ceremonies are a way in which PMLD young people mark many occasions both inside and outside school, through music, dancing and a general air of joyful exuberance. Therefore I felt it a highly appropriate way to celebrate Sam's achievement of his Supertask. The celebration was also key to preparing the PMLD audience for exiting their *White Peacock* experience. Brecht writes specifically about actors creating a 'leave-taking mood in the audience' and is critical about the emotional strength of that mood lessening the capacity for his audience to think. He states that nobody is 'learning any lessons' under these circumstances and that 'in short, everybody feels'.³¹ My belief is that the reverse was the cultural and learning requirement for my case-study group for whom the mood and the feeling *was* the learning.

The celebration functioned as a link between fiction and reality. I would add that the ceremonial activities of being handed peacock feathers, opening the giant peacock tail and drumming, were a way of marking the PMLD young people's *own* achievements as an

³⁰ Schechner, p. 162.

³¹ Brecht, p. 26.

audience (in most cases, a first-time audience) alongside Sam's achievement of receiving Phoebe's phone number and photograph. The companions and teachers were celebrating the PMLD audience members' attainment of their cultural Supertask; their initiation into theatreness, having experienced a series of emotional events collectively as well as individually. Even if they had not made the connections and had 'read' the events episodically and 'in the moment', they had taken part in a storying experience and engaged in a collective state of integration and equality. They had worked together through the events, or 'knots of the story, those points at which extremes embrace'.³² This was a physically, emotionally and socially intense experience for our audience, evidenced particularly by the behaviours of Bud and Ash, and in order not to overwhelm or exhaust, I believe that the movement *between* the events was key to their engagement. I have called these links 'breathing spaces' and they were key components in the construction of an ethical framework.

Before moving on to define breathing spaces, I would like briefly to examine the acting process within the inner frame. It is a little unusual to enter into a discourse about dramaturgical structure without referring to the word 'action' as a central tenet and the use of 'event' as the key structural device to construct *White Peacock* is counter-intuitive to many theoreticians and practitioners. Spencer,

³² Barba, p. 95.

Stanislavski and Edgar for example, prefer to use the word 'action', a component which is much more 'slippery' to define.³³ This is because there is a range of interpretations of the word within dramaturgical contexts which, in my drive for clarity, I did not want to compromise. There is broad general agreement, however, that action is what drives the internal behaviour of the character towards their goal within the plot. Illustrating this, Edgar writes that, 'dramatic action occurs within a character's mind. It is the wanting of something'.³⁴ Thus the action drives the drama. But in terms of writing for PMLD audiences, anything labelled with the word 'internal' is unhelpful. This is because the action, if defined as what the character wants, is an *invisible* action. Sam's goal of wanting a girlfriend was an invisible one. He didn't tell the audience, but it strongly motivated him. It was an action operating inside his head. At the moment when he kissed Phoebe and translated that internal drive into a visible sign, supported by the three spectra, it became a *visible* event. That is why I chose to structure the play through visible events, not through invisible actions. These visible events could be linked chronologically in the narrative.³⁵

³³ Edgar, p. 17.

³⁴ Spencer, p. 88.

³⁵ The events were made 'visible' via a range of sensory routes for those audience members with visual impairment.

Breathing Spaces

Breathing spaces were created to provide 'down time' from the intense concentration and focus demanded by the events within the plot. In signification terms this change in 'weight' was supported through light, sound and action becoming generalised and diffuse, rather than focused and intense. The three spectra broadened out to include the entire sensorium, thus enabling the audience members to explore their individual needs or curiosities rather than the needs or curiosities dictated by the plot. The breathing spaces are shown in relation to the events in Figure 15.

The breathing spaces had five very specific functions: to provide respite from intense signification; to ease transition from one event to the next; to clarify the reality/fiction dyad; to offer access to elements of the narrative through multi-sensory interactivities; and to enable the metaphorical layer of text to be presented. I shall now explore each of these functions in turn.

i) Respite

Bennett writes that 'The spectator's mind is, of course, free to wander and be inattentive to what is on stage, and this is probably inevitable in the course of any performance'.³⁶ This makes an assumption that the audience member has the desire and the cognitive capacity to re-tune into the performance at will, without having lost vital

³⁶ Bennett, p. 140.

understandings connected with the plot. Bennett does recognise that playwrights help with this process in the form of *longueurs* that are placed between the more important textual passages. When performing to young audiences there is an expectation, as Andrew Breakwell, Director of Roundabout Education at Nottingham Playhouse acknowledges, that there will be 'shuffle moments' at some point.³⁷ These are low-level, collective disruptions of focus enabling a form of cognitive re-grouping to occur, preparing everyone for re-joining the narrative. For PMLD audiences I argue that this re-joining is extremely challenging for two reasons. Firstly, this process makes significant demands on cognitive function, as Lily proved in the time it took for her to process changes of mood or stimuli. Secondly, there needs to be cultural understanding in place to provide the motivation for the audience to re-join in order to find out what happens next. In order to address these needs, within *White Peacock*, I provided breathing spaces for the audience enabling them to tune out if they chose to do so.

³⁷ Discussed during informal conversations with Andrew Breakwell.

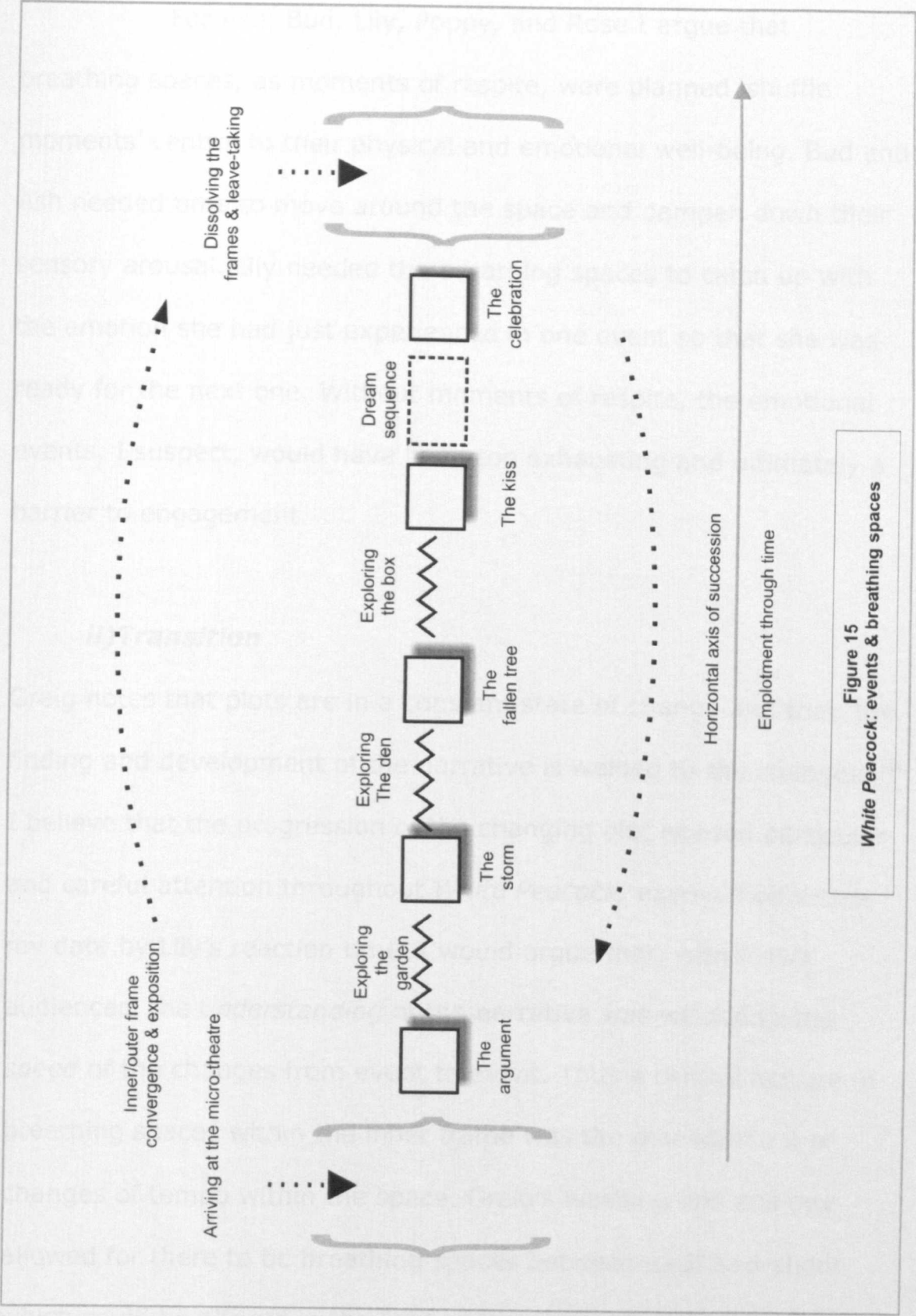


Figure 15
White Peacock: events & breathing spaces

For Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy, and Rose I argue that breathing spaces, as moments of respite, were planned 'shuffle moments' central to their physical and emotional well-being. Bud and Ash needed time to move around the space and dampen down their sensory arousal. Lily needed the breathing spaces to catch up with the emotion she had just experienced in one event so that she was ready for the next one. Without moments of respite, the emotional events, I suspect, would have been too exhausting and ultimately a barrier to engagement.

ii) Transition

Greig notes that plots are in a constant state of change and that 'the finding and development of the narrative is welded to the changes'.³⁸ I believe that the progression of the changing plot needed particular and careful attention throughout *White Peacock*, exemplified within my data by Lily's reaction time. I would argue that, with PMLD audiences, the *understanding* of the narrative was welded to the *speed* of the changes from event to event. Thus a central feature of breathing spaces within the inner frame was the management of changes of tempo within the space. Greig's washing-line analogy allowed for there to be breathing spaces between each bed-sheet which could be altered in the light of the needs of each individual audience, and this allowed the performing team to usefully 'control

³⁸ Greig, p. 87.

the tempo of a play's consumption'.³⁹ *White Peacock* was constructed with flexible breathing spaces between the 'sheets' in order to support PMLD audiences with the speed of individual consumptions. The events themselves were fixed, but the breathing spaces between them could be adjusted by the performing team. An example of this, and something which I recorded in my field journal, occurred when the actor playing Phoebe sensed the readiness of the audience to move from the handling of the Indian artefacts in Sam's den to the feeling of the rain outside the den. There was evidence of the companions using this transition time to negotiate re-entry into the space, as exemplified by the careful work that took place between Bud and his companion during the second performance. This was possible because both parties had gained knowledge of the structure of the piece during the first performance.

iii) Reality/Fiction dyad

The notion of reflexivity has been examined throughout this thesis and the breathing spaces are key to the creation of a safe ethical framework within which audiences can experience emotion-rich narrative theatre. Discussing the importance of reflexivity in theatre for children and young people, Schonmann states that:

The aesthetic stance inhibits our motor activity and helps process our feelings, therefore when the child loses aesthetic

³⁹ Edgar, p. 10.

distance he (sic) sinks into the *as if* situation as though it were a real life situation.⁴⁰

Schonmann posits that for the child to be fluent in the conventions of the inner frame (which provide the 'constant reminders' required for this aesthetic distance) they need repeated exposure to theatre.⁴¹

She states that 'the conventions are the language of the medium that they should possess as they possess a second language' and that the ability to differentiate between 'fiction and truth and truth as fiction' is inextricably linked with learning these conventions.⁴² Of course, Schonmann's assertions are predicated on a non-PMLD child's acquisition of cultural competence. For *White Peacock* audience members, they were quite possibly encountering 'constant reminders' for the first time within a process of initiation. They were, during their first visit to the play, in Blau's terms, an audience without a history. The breathing spaces offered new audiences *repeated* opportunities *within the play* to experience the change in weight within the space. The juxtaposition of the sign-intense 'up time' of the events with the sign-diffuse 'down time' of the breathing spaces reinforced the idea that the emotional moments contained in the former were a cultural construction. This reinforcement contributed to 'preventing an unwanted element of illusion' and protected the audience from feeling as if they were part of real life throughout the performance.⁴³

⁴⁰ Schonmann, p. 65.

⁴¹ Schonmann, p. 90.

⁴² Schonmann, p. 90.

⁴³ Brecht, p. 141.

iv) Sensorium

The importance of the sensorium for PMLD audiences has been explored extensively through the work of Bamboozle and Oily Cart in Chapter Three, but here I re-visit the concept in the context of the breathing spaces construct. The spaces between the intense foregrounded events were opportunities to broaden out access routes through a range of sensory interactivities. These took place between the performers and the audience with specific emphasis on the haptic and olfactory routes. It was at those moments that my work was most aligned with Bamboozle and Oily Cart as 'sense experience' was made available to members of the audience should they choose to access the plot in this way.⁴⁴ All of the case-study students took part in these activities voluntarily. Indeed, for some of the most profoundly disabled audience members, the sensory interactivities were primary access routes into the plot; thus the presence of the breathing spaces were key to that access and attainment of the values contained in Article 31. The rationale for tactility, in particular for Rose working with the wet stones, was indisputable; the reaching-out and touching of objects was a fundamental way in which she accessed the story.

In contrast to Bennett's definition of *longueurs* as being 'time out' moments, the sensory interactivities within the breathing spaces offered the option of additional 'time in' for those audience members

⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty, p. 3.

who wished to participate. An example of this was the breathing space which took place in Sam's den during which the audience members were invited to smell patchouli oil, touch the contrasting textures of brass and silk, explore, and make sounds with, metal finger cymbals.

v) Metaphorical Text

The breathing spaces were the opportunity to include an extra level of poetic text not directly related to the progress of the plot. This text was playwright-led, in Spencer's terms, inspired by the cross-cultural and mythical representation of peacocks and, structurally, underscored the transitional moments between events taking the form of song lyrics or spoken prose with musical accompaniment. An example of this is 'Stars', which forms the lyrics of a song that accompanies Sam's dream sequence towards the end of the play. Operating independently from the plot events, Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose made their personal meanings through the auditory stimulus of the sound of the words and music, without the need for cognitive understanding of the content of the text. This is a notion that I explored fully in Chapter One. In addition, these poetic texts taken from Indian myths and traditional stories, provided polysemic meaning-making opportunities for diverse audiences, and may be an example of 'ur-play' emerging from my need as a writer to create metaphorical meaning.

Finally in my analysis of breathing spaces, there is the role of Sam's dream sequence as an important part of the inner/outer frame intersection. Although I have analysed the 'Happiness' event as key to the dissolving of the inner frame, it was the 'dream sequence' breathing space that prepared the audience for the final event. In his description of the importance of narratives, Bruner encapsulates the need to handle very carefully the cessation of the story. He writes that, 'Narratives (truth or fiction) end with a coda, restoring teller and listener to the here and now' and I was aware of the need to craft the ending of the play very carefully.⁴⁵ In order to do this I created a structural device that, although not an event, was a space between the bed-sheets of fixed duration and accessed by all of the audience members simultaneously. It was an underscored slide-projection sequence with no additional signification support such as haptic activities or communication between the actors and the audience. Its purpose was to begin the end of the play. The dream is a video projection sequence with stick figures representing the characters. Within my case-study group, it was impossible to know if the students could de-code the meaning of the projected images. However, meaning-making was their secondary purpose, available for those audience members who *could* access the images and re-cap on the narrative. Leave-taking and the restoration of the real world was the primary function of the sequence as it allowed time for the

⁴⁵ Bruner, p. 94.

audience to begin to switch off their active emotional spectatorship and be prepared for leaving the micro-theatre. The dream sequence was a significant example of the interconnectedness of the outer and inner frames.

Phatic Functions

I shall now consider the channels of communication and types of dramatic language operating in *White Peacock*. Within his schema of the polyfunctionality of dramatic language, Pfister defines the phatic function as the channel of communication between speaker and listener and writes that, 'we do not just mean the physical link which enables the dramatist to convey information from sender to receiver; we are also referring to the psychological willingness of both parties to communicate with each other'.⁴⁶ This can be examined in relation to the types of communication that took place both during the events and the breathing spaces. He uses the term 'channels' in the same way as Elam, describing the way in which signals travel from the performers to the audience, and I have used the term 'communication pathways' to describe this process elsewhere in my thesis. I argue that there were different phatic channels operating within the events, compared to those operating within the breathing spaces. Within the events, particularly 'Sadness' and 'Love', the phatic channels resembled those found in theatre for non-disabled

⁴⁶ Pfister, p. 13.

audiences with function reliant on diverse factors such as the 'spatial lay-out of the stage and auditorium in order to guarantee the best possible acoustics and visibility'.⁴⁷ Of course, Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose had individual needs in terms of acoustics and vision, some of which were captured in the data, so key to keeping those channels clear was investing the students with the freedom to move around the space and custom-build their own channels alongside their companions. For example, Rose chose to position herself in close proximity to a bass speaker from which sounds emanated and thus found her own place within the 'sonic architecture' of the micro-theatre.⁴⁸ This same speaker could have been a source of physical discomfort to Bud, who with sensory modulation issues, might have chosen to move away from the speaker and simply watch the lips of a singing actor.

Within *White Peacock* there were collective and fixed events being communicated, but the routes to their reception were customised, and to some extent controlled, by the individual needs of the audience members. This is a phatic function that Pfister does not consider in his schema but was present in *White Peacock* at the moments when customised activities were offered to audience members and to which there were equally individualised responses. The channels became much more reliant on a range of one-to-one communications, namely: between actor and audience member,

⁴⁷ Pfister, p. 113

⁴⁸ Pearson and Shanks, p. 104.

companion and audience member, or sensory stimulus and audience member. Their success, of course, was reliant on the use of the unique cultural library throughout the performance. I will now explore the notion of character within this phatic landscape.

Character

Discussing the role of the actor as a major source of objectification for the audience, Brecht argues that 'he (sic) who is showing himself should be shown' and this self-conscious way of moving into a fictional role at the moment of frame convergence was crucially important in managing the reality/fiction dyad in the writing and staging of *White Peacock*.⁴⁹ Sam, as controller of his environment, oversaw the horizontal axis of succession and the progression of the plot throughout the play and the use of direct address was key to the connection between Sam and the audience at the moment of convergence. Spencer writes about the capacity of direct address to create a connection between the characters and the audience. He writes:

... the audience is forced (perhaps seduced is the better term) into participating viscerally in the experience of the drama. They have stepped into the play and have begun literally to play a role in it.⁵⁰

⁴⁹ Brecht, p. 45.

⁵⁰ Spencer, p. 263.

Of course Spencer's definition of 'visceral' and mine have different implications. Spencer's is a metaphorical 'stepping into' and a *perceptual* viscosity, whereas the case-study audience needed to physically 'step into' the designed features of the micro-theatre in order to experience its visceral elements kinaesthetically. It was the responsibility of the actor playing Sam to create a relationship with the audience so that they could connect with the emotions he experienced throughout the events. For example, the evidence from the Companion Feedback Sheets records this phenomenon with great clarity during the 'Sadness' event with all of the students registering strong moments of focus and displays of emotion in reaction to Sam's devastation.

Phoebe's character was altogether different in its relationship with the audience. Although Sam brought about the physical changes to the location, it is Phoebe who encouraged the audience to explore its features. She modeled the characteristics of a brave explorer both to the PMLD audience members and their companions, offering them the challenge of touching, smelling and moving around the garden, the den and the celebration. She was on the threshold between character and facilitator, although she remained in role as Phoebe for both. In Brecht's terms, she managed 'the traffic between the stage and the auditorium.'⁵¹ There were many examples of the actor, as Phoebe, facilitating access through the liminality of her role recorded

⁵¹ Luckhurst, p. 116.

on the Companion Feedback Sheets. These include: Ash happily moving into the den and choosing an activity for himself, Rose moving to place her head on a piece of turf, Bud watching Phoebe sign 'sad', and Poppy throwing stones into the pond. Phoebe was also instrumental in encouraging everyone within the micro-theatre to lie down on the grass beneath Sam's tree canopy. The success of these moments was aided by the actor using 'everyvoice' throughout her facilitation.

There was, of course, a third character present in the play: the peacock itself. Brecht writes about the concept of scenic design as character within his analysis of Caspar Neher's set design for *Die Mutter*. He describes the set as having 'an attitude itself towards the incidents shown; it quoted, narrated, prepared and recalled'.⁵² The peacock was an observer, the speaker of the poetic text, and a constant part of Sam's life. Of course, it had a relatively minor presence in experiential terms when compared to the relationship created with the audience by Sam and Phoebe. It appeared merely as a two-dimensional projection and a sound effect until the celebration at the end. At that point it became the major character in the event as the giant cloth tail and the real peacock feathers were brought into the space, creating multi-valent interactive opportunities for the audience. The power of the audience to enable the tail to open made the concept of transformation an attainable Supertask.

⁵² Brecht, p. 57.

In addition to representations of its physical presence, the peacock was a metaphor for Sam's transformation from boyhood to manhood, underpinning the themes of the play. Sam's growing independence saw the bird change from a monochromatic, aloof, unreachable creature to a multi-coloured, accessible presence. His emotional collapse as the tree containing the bird's roost blew down signified his mourning for a lost childhood, further highlighted by him finding the memory box buried under the tree by his mother. This level of connotation and denotation was, of course, unlikely to be attainable by PMLD audiences, but this metaphor contributed to meaning-making for the non-disabled companions. As a writer, I codified meaning within the character of the peacock for the different cognitive and cultural capacities within diverse audiences.

Repeat Performances

Repeating the performance emerges from the case-study evidence as the most important feature to impact on both the cultural construct, and fictional content, of *White Peacock*. The evidence taken from the Companion Feedback Sheets, the video recording and my field journal suggests that the first performance functioned as a cultural initiation and served the purpose of acclimatising Ash, Bud, Poppy, Lily and Rose to the aestheticised space. During their first visit to the micro-theatre, they were exposed to multi-sensory interactivities, a *modus operandi* with which they were familiar, and the sub-set of the

three spectra as foregrounding conventions, with which they were not. Core to this acclimatisation was the freedom to exit and re-enter the space at will, in order to juxtapose the familiar world of the school hall with the unfamiliar world of the micro-theatre. This reflexivity helped with the creation of a hitherto unrequired outer frame and an horizon of expectations. In Barthes' terms, the students lost their innocence during the first performance.

As evidenced by the observed behaviours of all of the case-study students, the engagement with the emotional events of the narrative was much more noticeable during the second performance. Emotional behaviour *had* been visible during the first, but was more connected with general arousal as a result of the new experience and its unknowns. This level of arousal diminished and made way for more purposeful and controlled emotional engagement with the core narrative events, foregrounded through sound, light and action. The students seemed to apply their own iterations, with their reactions to the second performance being adapted as a result of cultural learning that took place during the first. This is exemplified by Poppy's contrasting reactions to the 'Sadness' moment. During the first performance she became very still when she heard Sam crying and held her companion's hand. These were signs of mild genuine distress. The trigger of the sad music caused her to turn her back on the action. This indicated that she was engaged in the sad moment, but still opting to remain within the micro-theatre. During the second

performance, Poppy appeared to know that the moment was approaching and chose to sit on the floor next to Sam within the heavily signified lit area next to the twigs. Her companion records that 'she anticipated [and] jumped up just before [the] sad moment. When [there was the] sad part Poppy looked as if she were crying. She 3-4 times wiped her face with her tee shirt. Poppy briefly looked at Sam and Phoebe whilst Phoebe was signing 'sad' in front of her.' This indicates that she was prepared for the moment, opting into it and mirroring Sam's emotion. She may have appeared to be crying but she chose to remain within the aestheticised space, seemingly aware that it was a story.

If there had only been one performance, Poppy's experience of the sad moment would have been suffused with mild distress that she was unable to fully contextualise within a fiction. I suggest that repeating performances for PMLD audiences is the most significant way by which they learn the concept of differently real. The first time round, it might feel real, but the second time, through its repetition, renders it differently so. This, I suggest is an important contribution to an emergent discourse.

This chapter concludes with two sections summarising the key points to emerge from my research, and together these form the basis of recommendations for good practice for future theatre-makers in this field. The first section sets out three foundational principles;

the second develops *Jasmine's Guidelines*, written in her fictitious voice, in which the foundational principles are embedded.

Foundational Principles

Having positioned new insights gathered from my case-study students against the work of key theoreticians, I have created three foundational principles without which access to dramatic narrative for PMLD audiences, and thus attainment of the aims of Article 31, is restricted. More fundamentally, with regard to enabling such audiences to 'participate freely' within the Article, I argue that without these principles being in place, the capacity for engagement within a safe ethical framework is questionable. I have labelled these principles: physical comfort, the management of emotional arousal and reflexivity. I now examine these in greater detail.

Physical comfort

It must be recognised that restricted mobility, and the resultant discomfort, has the power to overtake and potentially negate the effect of signifiers within the performance space. In their analysis of the effect on a disabled actor of scenographic constraints within the 'designed or built environment of performance', Pearson and Shanks state that:

It may restrict my kinesic, proxemic and haptic abilities, capacities and potentials through increases in hazard, body

stress, demand (energy expenditure) and overload

(exhaustion) by the closure, or limitation of sensory channels.⁵³

The restrictions and concerns outlined above are in the context of a *performer's* constriction within the on-stage space associated with more formal, fixed proxemics. However, they are also highly relevant to PMLD *audiences*. Having observed the case-study students, I argue that without physical comfort within the space, concentration, focus, and thus foregrounding of emotion, is impossible due to the discomforts associated with restricting freedom of movement for people who have complex physical needs. The most significant way of addressing this is the creation of a micro-theatre space, within which audience members can choose where, how, and when to sit or move throughout the performance. In addition to comfort *within* the micro-theatre, open physical access to the *outside* of the performing area enables the audience members to experience physically free participation, using the visible 'means of ready escape' to lessen potential distress and dampen down sensory inputs for those with sensory modulation issues.⁵⁴ For PMLD audiences, physical comfort extends to the auditory, visual and olfactory channels and free movement into and out of the micro-theatre enables personal and empowered calibration of these inputs.

This concern with human rights and captive audiences has little visibility within the current discourse. Bennett's analysis of outer and

⁵³ Pearson and Shanks, p. 18.

⁵⁴ Jackson, p. 8.

inner frames does+ not need to take these factors into account for two reasons. Firstly, the non-disabled theatre-goer is able to leave at will, unlike the profoundly disabled theatre-goer who is reliant upon their companion to facilitate the leave-taking. This notion of open access is further complicated by current cultural conventions dictating that the audience cannot exit the space and then return repeatedly. To do so would simply make 'coming and going' part of the signification system operating within the theatre space along with the intentional and unintentional communication associated with such free traffic.

Emotional arousal and its Consequences

Equally important is an awareness of the emotional needs of PMLD audiences who may be encountering the intensely crafted three spectra stimuli for the first time. In writing about autistic young people with severe learning disabilities and their reactions to emotional arousal, Jordan states:

Whatever the fundamental cause, it seems true that many individuals with autism and SLD have problems in managing their levels of arousal. Levels of arousal may shoot up, resulting in the person being overwhelmed by stimulation and reacting with extreme irritation or withdrawal.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ Jordan, p. 147.

It is of fundamental importance that the theatre-maker, along with the performers, avoid over-stimulating the emotions in PMLD audiences. The use of breathing spaces plays an important role in this process and the performers need to be empowered to use these flexibly, in response to the degree of arousal they are witnessing. The reason for avoiding over-stimulation is two-fold. Firstly, I believe there is an ethical, child protection issue concerned with over-stimulating vulnerable audiences. Secondly, I would posit that uncontrolled emotional arousal moves the audience member *away* from the stimulus offered, rather than maintaining their engagement *with* it. My concern is that by triggering such responses in audience members there is a concomitant requirement to return them to a state of calm receptivity. Returning to a receptive state is a pre-requisite in enabling continued engagement with the foregrounded narrative. This is, at best, a difficult task and, at worst, an impossible one.

An extreme form of such arousal, is the 'startle' reflex, and this basic uncontrolled physiological reaction to sudden stimuli is something to be avoided in the context of performance. The reason for the lack of this reflex in the recorded data is because I wrote *White Peacock*, and worked with the performers, in such a way that it was avoided from the outset. I am including it within these foundational principles as I believe it is of fundamental importance to theatre-makers who may be first-time creators of such work. To

startle is to *over-stimulate* an audience member. This response is most commonly triggered by sudden, loud sounds; within *White Peacock*, we retained engagement through gradual musical crescendi to create dramatic impact. It is highly likely that the PMLD audience will feel distressed and disconnected as a result of stimulating the startle reflex.

Reflexivity

It is within the third foundational principle where I believe this study can contribute new discourse. The research clearly indicates to me that through hierarchising the three spectra, as a sub-set of the multi-sensory approach, it is possible to foreground emotional narratives for PMLD audiences. The corollary of this process, however, is the need to use the intersection of the outer and inner frames to retain the artifice of fiction. Thus the presence of structural constructs required to maintain audience reflexivity is a third foundational principle to the work. Audiences such as Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose need to be engaged with, but not be lost within, the emotions depicted in a play. There are a number of recommendations for achieving this, which are embedded in Jasmine's summarising statements below, but I would posit that the three most important are: enabling the audience to juxtapose the world outside the micro-theatre with the aestheticised space within it, the presence of breathing spaces, and the repetition of the performance.

Having created the foundational principles, I now summarise the findings of the research journey through the fictitious words of Jasmine. I have called these summarising statements *Jasmine's Guidelines*, and within them are embedded the foundational principles. They are a practitioner-friendly series of recommendations for good practice and, once again, I have simplified Bennett's framing concepts into three discrete elements.

Jasmine's Guidelines

• Outer Frame

The best way for me to access theatre is for a space – a micro-theatre - to be built within a large room in my school.

This empowers me:

- *to move in and out of the micro-theatre during the performance to help reassure myself that the play, and the emotions in it, are not real.*
- *to focus on the play when I choose to be inside the micro-theatre and not to be distracted by the outside world.*

It is really helpful if a musician collects me from my classroom and invites me to join them on a journey to the place where I will experience the play, accompanying me with music that I will hear again later.

I need to be connected with both worlds so please leave a couple of entrances visible and permanently accessible throughout the play.

● **Frame Convergence**

There may be a diverse audience visiting the play, including visitors from beyond the school. It will save your energy if you use the same tone of voice for everyone and I don't respond well to being patronised.

Please provide me with a choice of different types of seating. I like bean-bags but some of my peers prefer chairs or stools.

I will come to the play with my companion, who will remain with me. S/he will be able to help you understand my unique way of communicating. Please reassure her/him that I might want to access the emotional moments of the story on my own and that the play is structured to help me to do that. My companion is there to support me but not to become part of the performance.

When the play is about to begin, ease me in gently as you transform from actors to characters. It helps if you sing my name as part of this transformation because it helps me to feel at home and draws me in to the world of the play.

- **Inner Frame**

I would appreciate it if you chose a story that was appropriate to my real age rather than my developmental age. I particularly enjoy stories that have a range of emotions.

Before the play arrives, please send us the basic story along with some PECS symbols. This helps me to understand that a play is a story.

I am used to stories and am familiar with the words 'now' and 'next'. So please create a story with a beginning, a middle and an end.

Please choose a location that lends itself to multi-sensory interactivities.

It is best for me if the story is broken up into emotional events and breathing spaces. These work together to make the play accessible to me.

- **Emotional Events**

In order for me to access emotional events, it is really helpful if you use the silence-sound, darkness-light and stillness-action spectra. The last one is the territory of the actors. You can combine the spectra to help me focus. You need to be bold. For

example, it might work to have a character laughing or crying in a completely dark space. It is sometimes difficult for me to process too many stimuli at once.

Please do not startle me by creating sudden loud noises, or changes of light state, as it will take me a while to calm down and re-tune.

There are two good ways of engaging me during events:

- a) you can fill the micro-theatre with light, sound and action to saturate the space with emotion. This is even better if I am able to move around with the actors.*
- b) you can focus the emotional energy through light, sound and action to draw me towards a targeted moment. This might result in me being still. I engage especially well if you repeat the focused emotional moment using lots of anticipation with increasing intensity. Three repetitions work well.*

I can engage with both a) and b) as long as you provide me with regular breathing spaces.

- **Breathing Spaces**

These are really important emotional 'time out' breaks in the story. But please enable me to remain engaged through informal multi-sensory interactivities during these times. I love

to touch, sniff, communicate and have an awareness of 'wash' music, sounds and visuals. My friends and I especially enjoy communal interactivities where we do things all at the same time without needing to take turns.

Breathing spaces also help me to understand that the emotional events are not real by interrupting their pace and intensity.

It is helpful if one of the actors can work as a character both inside the story and with me, outside the story. This reassures me, gives me confidence to move around the micro-theatre, helps me to engage with multi-sensory interactivities and to feel more involved when the emotional events happen.

Expect to hear me communicating with myself and others, especially during the emotional events. It is my way of keeping connected with the world.

Expect me to move around.

Provide me with plenty of time towards the end of the play for my feelings to settle and to prepare for re-entry into my real world.

I'm happy to join-in a celebration at the end because I am familiar with partying! Hopefully, I will have achieved the milestone of being a willing member of an audience and would enjoy celebrating this with you.

It is my belief that the attainment of active (and safe) emotional spectatorship might best be achieved through following the foundational principles along with the careful building of the framing constructs triad, as outlined above. I hope that in extrapolating the findings and distilling them into these principles and guidelines, the reader can glimpse some of the profound insights which this process afforded me. Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose were, and continue to be, a presence throughout my thinking, teaching and theatre-making. This thesis provides me with a new platform from which to address the cultural anomaly preventing these disenfranchised young citizens from attaining the right to participate freely in a cultural life of which narrative theatre, rich in emotion, is a component. In addition, these guidelines for theatre-makers can help 'encourage the provision of appropriate and equal opportunities for cultural, artistic, recreational and leisure activity' which forms Part 2 of Article 31. These guidelines are, of course, not the end of this process.

At the time of writing, *White Peacock* is awaiting revival having been awarded ACE funding for a national tour of regional theatres and partnership special schools in Spring 2013. Nottingham

Playhouse's commitment to issues of access and equality is exemplified by their tenacious funding applications to ACE. A key part of the bid was the inclusion of a mentoring scheme that will ensure that a writer and a director, with an interest in making work for PMLD audiences, will work alongside myself and the Playhouse company during rehearsals. Their insights and creativity will result in a new piece being performed in Spring 2014. This will test out and possibly create amendments to, *Jasmine's Guidelines*, as it is put into practice as a toolkit for practitioners. One of the biggest challenges to regional theatres which host *White Peacock* on tour is the recommendation that performances are repeated to the same audience. It remains to be seen if this will be implemented, as there are cost implications for audience members who may need to be charged double for seeing the piece twice. A balance will need to be made between profit margin and the recommendations of this research project.

Despite having been well received in schools and within the broader audiences as represented in Figure 1, reviving *White Peacock* offers me the opportunity to nuance aspects of the performance. I feel there needs to be further work on the economical use of language, pause and stillness within the events to support audience members on the autistic spectrum for whom clarity and slow pacing is essential. In terms of frame convergence and breathing spaces, I feel there is particular scope for the development of iterative practice within the micro-theatre with greater use of the malleability of the

communication pathways between Jasmine, Lesley and the performers. The capacity of the performer to be constantly aware of audience reception, as outlined in Boot's Taxonomy, is key to the production of meaning for Jasmine and this has implications for casting and training. There is the potential for awareness-raising amongst casting directors, producers and agents with regard to the former and training bodies for the latter. Generally speaking, future work needs to focus on dissemination of *White Peacock* as a concept, or an approach, which can go some way to addressing the challenges of making performances for PMLD audiences.

General Conclusion

This thesis began with the words of Jasmine and Lesley, fictitious characters, whose thoughts and feelings guided the reader through the research journey which followed. I introduced Ash, Bud, Lily, Poppy and Rose, my case-study students, before going on to discuss the challenges to these young people in accessing theatre. This set the research in the context of Article 31 and the freedoms associated with enabling access to age appropriate cultural activity for all.

Having considered ACE and its responsibilities to deliver the Article and its values, it was clear that PMLD audiences were outside the reach of regional producing houses, resulting in their invisibility and disenfranchisement as cultural consumers.

In order to consider further the cultural barriers to access, I examined audience reception theory to find that there was little in the current discourse which considered the varied and individualised needs of profoundly disabled audiences. Bennett's frames provided a useful framework enabling me to nuance the historical, systemic and cognitive barriers surrounding Jasmine's access to theatre.

In Chapter Two I focused on the work of Bamboozle and Oily Cart Theatre Companies, which specialise in theatre-making for PMLD audiences. These companies create flexible, multi-sensory pieces with individual choice and customised communication pathways within micro-theatre spaces. However, I argued that despite their skill and experience in this field, there remains a shortfall in provision for two reasons. Firstly, the positioning of these companies outside ACE funded regional producing houses limits their capacity and distances them further from statutory government funding. Secondly, despite the audiences reacting emotionally within their pieces, they do not place emotional *narratives* at the core of their work. I was interested in exploring whether, by hierarchising sound, light and action within the multi-sensory approach, it might be possible to signpost, and thus foreground, narrative moments of emotional intensity for PMLD audiences.

The remainder of the thesis looked to address these shortfalls. The systemic shortfall was to be addressed by the positioning of my research, and dissemination of its findings, within Nottingham

Playhouse, an ACE funded regional producing house. Addressing the cultural shortfall of emotional narratives was a two-stage process. As a result of *Thumbs Up*, *Harry* and *Tree* confirmed that the three spectra were valuable strategies in foregrounding narrative moments but left unexplored the development of a narrative plot, and how to create a safe ethical framework for PMLD audiences who need clear demarcations between reality and fiction. *White Peacock*, the data it generated, and its subsequent analysis, confirmed the usefulness of Bennett's outer and inner frames in tackling ethical access.

Having returned to a theoretical framework at the beginning of Chapter Six, I summarised my findings in two forms. The first was three foundational principles to guide policy-makers, producers, funders and directors. The second was *Jasmine's Guidelines*, written in her fictitious voice, in which the principles are embedded. These are recommendations for good practice that embody the learning journey I undertook. The purpose of the principles and the guidelines is to add to the current discourse, address notions of access in a practical way and retain Jasmine's voice at the core of the work. I hope that this research its findings, and its application will go some way towards addressing the attainment of rights embodied in Article 31 for PMLD audiences.

Appendices

Appendix 1

Opportunities for dissemination 2010-2012

ASSITEJ Conference

University of Westminster

Delivered paper entitled: *Profoundly disabled audiences: an exciting challenge for theatre-makers. Making the case for an exclusive inclusivity.*

As a result of this conference, I wrote a book chapter awaiting publication by Trentham in Autumn 2012/Spring 2013.

ASSITEJ Japanese conference, London.

Attended workshop with Dr Cecily O'Neill.

University of Nottingham

Delivered lecture in Contemporary Performance to 3rd year undergraduate students.

Nottingham Trent University

Delivered lecture entitled: *Working with Disabled Young People through Theatre* for 2nd year Theatre Design undergraduate students.

Central School of Speech and Drama

Attended lecture entitled: 'Creating Performance Environments'.

National Drama Conference. (International) 'Same Difference', University of Swansea.

Delivered paper entitled: *White Peacock: A TIE show for audiences with profound and multiple learning disabilities.*

It is intended that this paper will be submitted to the National Drama magazine for publication and peer review.

ASSITEJ International Congress, Malmo/Copenhagen May 2011

Building Bridges Crossing Borders.

Invited to become a core member of ASSITEJ/TYA UK Disability sub-committee. This involved numerous planning meetings as TYA UK was invited to host a day at Congress. This was the first time that ASSITEJ had addressed the issue of disability theatre. Involvement was two-fold:

- To deliver a key-note speech to delegates attending the day. The speech was entitled: *Theatre for Profoundly Disabled Audiences: the ultimate challenge for Article 31.*
- To collaborate with Peter Rumney and two students from NTU, to create a mapping space for the international congress 2011. The aim of the space was to:
 - a) collect data about companies across the world making work in this field
 - b) gather feedback from international delegates who have taken part in Disability Theatre day.



The Mapping Space.

Also invited to deliver a paper at the ITYARN day during Congress. This organisation is the academic wing of ASSITEJ and draws from a global academic body. Title of paper: *Audiences with Complex Disabilities: a challenge for Article 31.*

I am grateful to the School of English Studies, the AHRC RTSG, Graduate School Travel Prize and the Arts Council for financial support for attendance at Congress.

Central School of Speech and Drama

Spring 2012

Performing Research: Creative Exchanges

Deliver a paper to the group entitled:

Audiences with Complex Disabilities: a challenge for Article 31.

University of Reading

Spring 2012.

Delivered a seminar to the Research Seminar Group. The specific focus was the challenge of ethical protocols in researching performance in special needs contexts.

Appendix 2

'Thumbs Up'

Working scripts of devised performances

HARRY – Level 1

Laundry basket full of clothes pre-set SL, empty suitcase pre-set SR.

1. NARRATIVE WASH

I have a son called Harry.

Sometimes Harry can be cheeky, and his room's always a mess.

Harry and I go to the swimming pool every Saturday, and he likes to watch football on telly.

Today we're going on holiday.

Straight into...

2. PACKING SONG

(This is now twice the length, with a slow version followed immediately with the much faster one.)

Finish with pile of clothes on floor. GB leads activity getting kids to help sort out which clothes to take and which to leave. Mum picks up suitcase and the clothes fall out again. This time the kids have to put them in much quicker. GB settles the kids back in the space, all sitting separately.

Cat strikes laundry basket.

3. JOURNEY WASH

(Pulling suitcase around the space, on every second line turn in a circle)

The drive to the seaside.

On our way, on holiday.

In the car, fasten seatbelts!

On our way, on holiday.

Driving away from our house,

On our way, on holiday.

Driving down a country lane,

On our way, on holiday.

Driving along the motorway,

On our way, on holiday.

The drive to the seaside.

On our way, on holiday.

We've arrived on holiday.

Cat strikes suitcase

Beach SFX begin.

GB asks the kids what they can hear.

GB leads activity with the sea cloth.

Straight into...

4. LOST

Where's Harry?

Where's my son, Harry?

Harry? Harry? Harry?

Harry!

HARRY!

GB reinforces to the kids that Harry is all alone, and his Mum is worried. She uses the sea drum to create the sound of waves, and leads into...

5. FOUND

It's alright! I've found him!

I thought he might have –

The policeman said that –

If he'd gone over to the main road he could have –

And if he'd gone to the sea he might have –

Thank goodness he's safe.

Now we can get on with our day.

GB leads asks kids what the ends to Mum's sentences could have been.

Holiday activities:

- ***Bowls of water and sand; kids dip their feet into both***
- ***Students pull rubbish out of sand and put it into a bin bag***
- ***Black den – drip water from shell into a bowl with the torch***
- ***Black den – blowing bubbles with the torch***

6. ENDING

Well, what a day!

Me and Harry are completely exhausted. It's time for bed.

HARRY – Level 2

HARRY THEME WASH – [JOURNEY MUSIC VARIANT]

Laundry basket full of clothes pre-set SL, empty suitcase pre-set SR.

Clarinet pre-set behind micro-theatre.

6. NARRATIVE WASH

I have a son called Harry.

Sometimes Harry can be cheeky, and his room's always a mess.

Harry and I go to the swimming pool every Saturday, and he likes to watch football on telly.

Today we're going on holiday.

Straight into...

2. PACKING SONG

(This is now twice the length, with a slow version followed immediately with the much faster one.)

Finish with pile of clothes on floor. Mum leads activity getting kids to help sort out which clothes to take and which to leave.

MUSICAL REWARD [brass/steel drum?] ON CAT PLACING OBJECT IN SUITCASE

***Mum picks up suitcase and the clothes fall out again. This time the kids have to put them in much quicker. GB settles the kids back in the space, all sitting separately. Matt provides wash
Strike laundry basket.***

Cat leaves space

JOURNEY MUSIC IN - PLAY ONCE THROUGH

3. JOURNEY WASH

(Pulling suitcase around the space, on every second line turn in a circle)

The drive to the seaside.

On our way, on holiday.

In the car, fasten seatbelts!

On our way, on holiday.

Driving away from our house,

On our way, on holiday.

Driving down a country lane,

On our way, on holiday.

Driving along the motorway,

MUSIC VOLUME UP

On our way, on holiday.
The drive to the seaside.
On our way, on holiday.
We've arrived on holiday.

BEACH SFX

GB asks the kids what they can hear.
GB leads activity with the sea cloth.

FADE OUT ALL FX OTHER THAN THE WAVES

Straight into...

4. LOST

Where's Harry?
Where's my son, Harry?
Harry? Harry? Harry?
Harry!
HARRY!

LONELY [WITH CLARINET]

GB – sound of sea drum

5. FOUND

It's alright! I've found him!
I thought he might have –
The policeman said that –
If he'd gone over to the main road he could have –
And if he'd gone to the sea he might have –
Thank goodness he's safe.
Now we can get on with our holiday.

Holiday activities:

- ***Bowls of water and sand; kids dip their feet into both***
- ***Students pull rubbish out of sand and put it into a bin bag***
- ***Black den – drip water from shell into a bowl with the torch***
- ***Black den – blowing bubbles with the torch***

BEACH SFX – ALSO [ON STANDBY] PACKING/JOURNEY

6. ENDING

Well, what a day!

Me and Harry are completely exhausted. It's time for bed.

JOURNEY WASH

HARRY – Level 3

HARRY THEME WASH – [JOURNEY MUSIC VARIANT]

VIDEO: CLOUDS

Laundry basket full of clothes pre-set SL, empty suitcase pre-set SR.

Clarinet pre-set behind micro-theatre.

Kids enter.

7. NARRATIVE WASH

I have a son called Harry.

Sometimes Harry can be cheeky, and his room's always a mess.

Harry and I go to the swimming pool every Saturday, and he likes to watch football on telly.

Today we're going on holiday.

Straight into...

CLOUDS END

8. PACKING SONG

VIDEO: PACKING

(This is now twice the length, with a slow version followed immediately with the much faster one.)

Finish with pile of clothes on floor. Mum leads activity getting kids to help sort out which clothes to take and which to leave.

MUSICAL REWARD [brass/steel drum?] ON CAT PLACING OBJECT IN SUITCASE

*Mum picks up suitcase and the clothes fall out again. This time the kids have to put them in much quicker. GB settles the kids back in the space, all sitting separately. Matt provides wash
Strike laundry basket.*

Cat leaves space

JOURNEY MUSIC IN - PLAY ONCE THROUGH

VIDEO: DRIVING

6. JOURNEY WASH

Cat - Pulling suitcase around the space, on every second line turn in a circle. Occasional freeze.

The drive to the seaside.

On our way, on holiday.

In the car, fasten seatbelts!

On our way, on holiday.

Driving away from our house,

On our way, on holiday.

Driving down a country lane,

On our way, on holiday.

Driving along the motorway,

MUSIC VOLUME UP

On our way, on holiday.

The drive to the seaside.

On our way, on holiday.

We've arrived on holiday.

DRIVING ENDS

BEACH SFX

VIDEO: BEACH

GB asks the kids what they can hear.

GB leads activity with the sea cloth.

FADE OUT ALL FX OTHER THAN THE WAVES

Straight into...

7. LOST

Where's Harry?

Where's my son, Harry?

Harry? Harry? Harry?

Harry!

HARRY!

LONELY [WITH CLARINET]

VIDEO: STICK FIGURE AND EXPRESSIONS SEQUENCE

GB – sound of sea drum – STICK FIG. ENDS

8. FOUND

It's alright! I've found him!

I thought he might have –

The policeman said that –

If he'd gone over to the main road he could have –

And if he'd gone to the sea he might have –

Thank goodness he's safe.

Now we can get on with our holiday.

VIDEO: CLOUDS, BUCKET AND SPADE (?)

Holiday activities:

- ***Bowls of water and sand; kids dip their feet into both***
- ***Students pull rubbish out of sand and put it into a bin bag***
- ***Black den – drip water from shell into a bowl with the torch***
- ***Black den – blowing bubbles with the torch***

BEACH SFX – ALSO [ON STANDBY] PACKING/JOURNEY

**VIDEO: ROLLERCOASTER
LIVE FOOTAGE OF KIDS**

6. ENDING

Well, what a day!

Me and Harry are completely exhausted. It's time for bed.

JOURNEY WASH

TREE : Level 1

1. GARDEN WASH

GB sprays the fragrance

My name is Rachel.

Welcome to my garden!

Green grass.

Roses and lavender.

Blue skies and sunshine.

Bees buzz and birds sing.

This is my garden

2. MY TREE

In my garden is my tree.

I love my tree.

I love my tree because my Mum and Dad planted it for me when I was a baby.

I'm 18 now, and my tree has grown and grown and grown and grown and grown.

Look how big my tree is now.

Tree is lying USC, covered in sea cloth. Rachel picks it up and waves it, and eventually passes it to Gill, who continues the action as Rachel delivers STORM text.

3. THE STORM

Storm SFX

The wind is roaring in my ears.

The rain is soaking into my skin.

Thunder crashes all around me, and lightening illuminates the sky

A storm is here

A storm is here

A storm is here

GB operates fan. Sakina does water spray. Cat works with the kids/water sprays. Sakina brushes leaves up at the end.

GB gives Cat the nod to go into the den. SFX continue.

Rachel puts on mac and wellies and goes into the den. She begins to sing the Den song. Gill alerts students, who peep through walls of den and see Rachel on her own, singing.

Sakina and Gill open up the den while Cat plays the clarinet to kids. Matt gradually fades out SFX.

4. DISCOVERY OF FALLEN TREE

Gill asks students to turn to face away from the den, towards where the tree has been left, lying on its side.

Rachel discovers the fallen tree by uncovering the sea cloth. Dialogue is accompanied by sound of Rachel cracking twigs.

My tree!

Cracked, broken, snapped, twisted, crunched, smashed, damaged, dead.

My tree.

My poor tree.

Rachel stays with the tree while devastation music plays.

Devastation music

Gill asks the students to help her cheer Rachel up. They select a leaf and give it to Rachel, who sticks it onto a picture of a tree.

5. DISCOVERY OF BOX

Gill sits kids back in distant space. Parades the box, covered in soil

What's this?

A box.
What's it doing underneath my tree?
What's inside?

C takes the things out of the box one by one, ending with the photos.

Takes toddler photo. This is a photo of me when I was small.

Takes Mother and baby photo. This is a photo of me when I was a baby.

Takes dress. And this must have been my dress

Takes dummy. And this must have been my dummy

Takes teddy. And this must have been my... Mr. Fuzzy! I remember you! I used to cuddle you all night!

My Mum and Dad must have buried this box when they planted my tree, and when my tree fell over in the storm I saw the box for the first time.

6. SEED ACTIVITY

Look, there's a packet of seeds in here. What shall I do with these?

Allow the kids to respond.

If I plant these seeds, a new tree will grow and grow and grow and grow, just like the old one! Then I wouldn't feel so sad anymore!

Planting seeds – give one seed to each child, bring over pot and let them push the seed in. Musical reward.

And that is the end, but also the beginning.

DEN TEXT

In my den, I'm safe.

Safe from the storm that rages outside;

That rips through the trees and clatters on the roof.

In my den I'm safe.

I'm warm under a blanket.

I'll wait for the morning to arrive.

TREE : Level 2

7. GARDEN WASH

GB sprays the fragrance

My name is Rachel.

Welcome to my garden!

Green grass.

Roses and lavender.

Blue skies and sunshine.

Bees buzz and birds sing.

This is my garden

VIDEO: GARDEN WASH

8. MY TREE

In my garden is my tree.

I love my tree.

I love my tree because my Mum and Dad planted it for me when I was a baby.

I'm 18 now, and my tree has grown and grown and grown and grown and grown.

VIDEO: TREE WASH

Look how big my tree is now.

Tree is lying USC, covered in sea cloth. Catherine picks it up and waves it, and eventually passes it to Gill, who continues the action as Catherine delivers STORM text.

9. THE STORM

Storm SFX

VIDEO: STORM

The wind is roaring in my ears.

The rain is soaking into my skin.

Thunder crashes all around me, and lightening illuminates the sky

A storm is here

A storm is here

A storm is here

GB operates fan. Sakina does water spray. Cat works with the kids/water sprays. Sakina brushes leaves up at the end. GB gives Cat the nod to go into the den. SFX continue.

Rachel puts on mac and wellies and goes into the den. She begins to sing the Den song. Gill alerts students, who peep through walls of den and see Rachel on her own, singing. Sakina and Gill open up the den while Cat plays the clarinet to kids.

VIDEO: CANDLE

Gill invites kids into den.

Matt gradually fades out SFX.

10. DISCOVERY OF FALLEN TREE

Gill asks students to turn to face away from the den, towards where the tree has been left, lying on its side.

Rachel discovers the fallen tree by uncovering the sea cloth. Dialogue is accompanied by sound of Rachel cracking twigs.

My tree!

Cracked, broken, snapped, twisted, crunched, smashed, damaged, dead.

My tree.

My poor tree.

Rachel stays with the tree while devastation music plays.

Devastation music

Gill asks the students to help her cheer Rachel up.

VIDEO: TWILIGHT

They select a leaf and give it to Rachel, who sticks it onto a picture of a tree.

11. DISCOVERY OF BOX

Gill sits kids back in distant space. Parades the box, covered in soil

What's this?

A box.

What's it doing underneath my tree?

What's inside?

C takes the things out of the box one by one, ending with the photos.

Takes toddler photo. This is a photo of me when I was small.

Takes Mother and baby photo. This is a photo of me when I was a baby.

Takes dress. And this must have been my dress

Takes dummy. And this must have been my dummy

Takes teddy. And this must have been my... Mr. Fuzzy! I remember you! I used to cuddle you all night!

My Mum and Dad must have buried this box when they planted my tree, and when my tree fell over in the storm I saw the box for the first time.

12. SEED ACTIVITY

Look, there's a packet of seeds in here. What shall I do with these?

Allow the kids to respond.

If I plant these seeds, a new tree will grow and grow and grow and grow, just like the old one! Then I wouldn't feel so sad anymore!

Planting seeds – give one seed to each child, bring over pot and let them push the seed in. Musical reward.

And that is the end, but also the beginning.

TREE: Level 3

13. GARDEN WASH

TREE WASH MUSIC [& CLARINET]

GB sprays the fragrance

FADE WASH -

My name is Rachel.
Welcome to my garden!

BRING UP BIRDSONG

Green grass.
Roses and lavender.
Blue skies and sunshine.
Bees buzz and birds sing.
This is my garden

VIDEO: GARDEN WASH

FADE OUT BIRDSONG

14. MY TREE

In my garden is my tree.
I love my tree.
I love my tree because my Mum and Dad planted it for me when I
was a baby.
I'm 18 now, and my tree has grown...

LIVE TREE GROWING HARP

and grown and grown and grown and grown.

VIDEO: TREE WASH

Look how big my tree is now.

LIVE BIG THEME F-G PIANO PAD & RECORDED[?]

*Tree is lying USC, covered in sea cloth. Rachel picks it up
and waves it, and eventually passes it to Gill, who
continues the action as Rachel delivers STORM text.*

BIG PORTENTOUS CHORD – FADE OUT

GB: Let's see what's going to happen to the tree

STORM MUSIC & LIVE 5 SFX

VIDEO: STORM

15. THE STORM

The wind is roaring in my ears.
The rain is soaking into my skin.

Thunder crashes all around me, and lightening illuminates the sky
A storm is here
A storm is here
A storm is here
GB operates fan. Sakina does water spray. Cat works with the kids/water sprays. Sakina brushes leaves up at the end.

FADE STORM MUSIC – LEAVE SFX GOING

START DEN SONG [LOGIC LOOP] – LOOP UNTIL GILL MOVES US ON
– LEAVE SFX GOING – PLAY LIVE WITH CAT CLARINET

GB gives Cat the nod to go into the den. SFX continue. Rachel puts on mac and wellies and goes into the den. She begins to sing the Den song. Gill alerts students, who peep through walls of den and see Rachel on her own, singing. Sakina and Gill open up the den. Cat plays the clarinet to kids.

VIDEO: CANDLE

***Gill invites kids into den.
Matt gradually fades out SFX.***

FADE OUT LIVE PLAYING & SFX

16. DISCOVERY OF FALLEN TREE

Gill asks students to turn to face away from the den, towards where the tree has been left, lying on its side. Rachel discovers the fallen tree by uncovering the sea cloth. Dialogue is accompanied by sound of Rachel cracking twigs.

My tree!

Cracked, broken, snapped, twisted, crunched, smashed, damaged, dead.

My tree.

My poor tree.

DEVASTATION MUSIC IN [LOGIC] – LET PLAY TO END

Rachel begins to cry.

Gill asks the students to help her cheer Rachel up.

VIDEO: TWILIGHT

They select a leaf and give it to Rachel, who sticks it onto a picture of a tree.

MUSICAL REWARD [HARP/PAD] F MAJOR

17. DISCOVERY OF BOX

Gill sits kids back in distant space. Parades the box covered in soil

What's this?

A box.

What's it doing underneath my tree?

What's inside?

PLAY LIVE [NEW PIECE OF MUSIC] – VIBES JAZZY IN C

C takes the things out of the box one by one, ending with the photos.

Takes toddler photo. This is a photo of me when I was small.

Takes Mother and baby photo. This is a photo of me when I was a baby.

Takes dress. And this must have been my dress

Takes dummy. And this must have been my dummy

Takes teddy. And this must have been my... Mr. Fuzzy! I remember you! I used to cuddle you all night!

My Mum and Dad must have buried this box when they planted my tree, and when my tree fell over in the storm I saw the box for the first time.

18. SEED ACTIVITY

Look, there's a packet of seeds in here. What shall I do with these?

Allow the kids to respond.

If I plant these seeds, a new tree will grow and grow and grow and grow, just like the old one! Then I wouldn't feel so sad anymore!

Planting seeds – give one seed to each child, bring over pot and let them push the seed in. Musical reward.

And that is the end, but also the beginning.

Appendix 3

Session with case-study group 24.3.10

Introductions around the circle. Sung.

Introducing the project:

- *My name is Gill and I write stories*
- *I've written a new story about a young man, a young woman and a bird*

Long pause

- *A big bird*

Long pause

- *A big white bird*

Long pause

- *A big white peacock*

Makaton signing for story, man, woman, bird, white, and peacock.

This sequence repeated with vocal anticipation building to greater crescendo each time.

- *My story will be performed as a play here at your school.*
- *The play is called White Peacock.*
- *I need a group of people to see my play and work with me to think about it.*
- *(Teacher x) and I thought that you might like to work on the play with me.*
- *I will need you to tell me which bits of the story make you happy, sad, laugh, feel scared or worried.*
- *You don't have to work with me on the play. It's up to you.*

- *You don't have to decide now.*
- *The people who know you well can help you to make your mind up.*
- *I can come back again and we can talk about it some more.*

Working with two contrasting type of white peacock feathers with each student.

Singing:

Big strong feather

Small soft feather.

Which do you like?

Allowing plenty of time for eye contact and choice.

Beginning singing at distance to lessen stress and confrontation.

Negotiating physical trust through gradually increasing touch pressure on hands, arms, legs.

Working to the side of the person to judge their interest in communicating and their tolerance of peripheral noise.

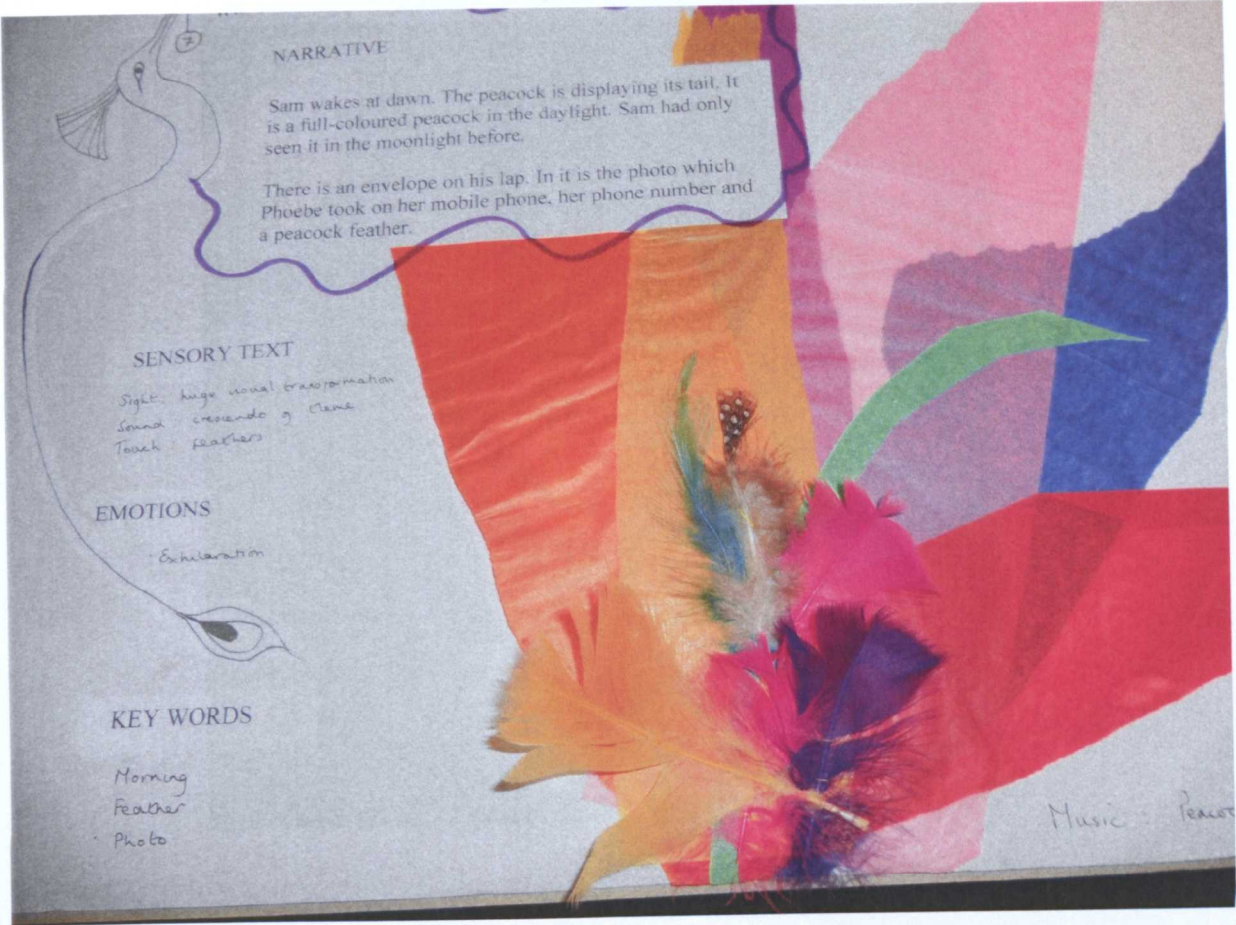
Reading 'Stars'. (See script p. 37)

Singing 'Nest' to individual students (See script p. 31)

Saying goodbye to individual students.

Appendix 4

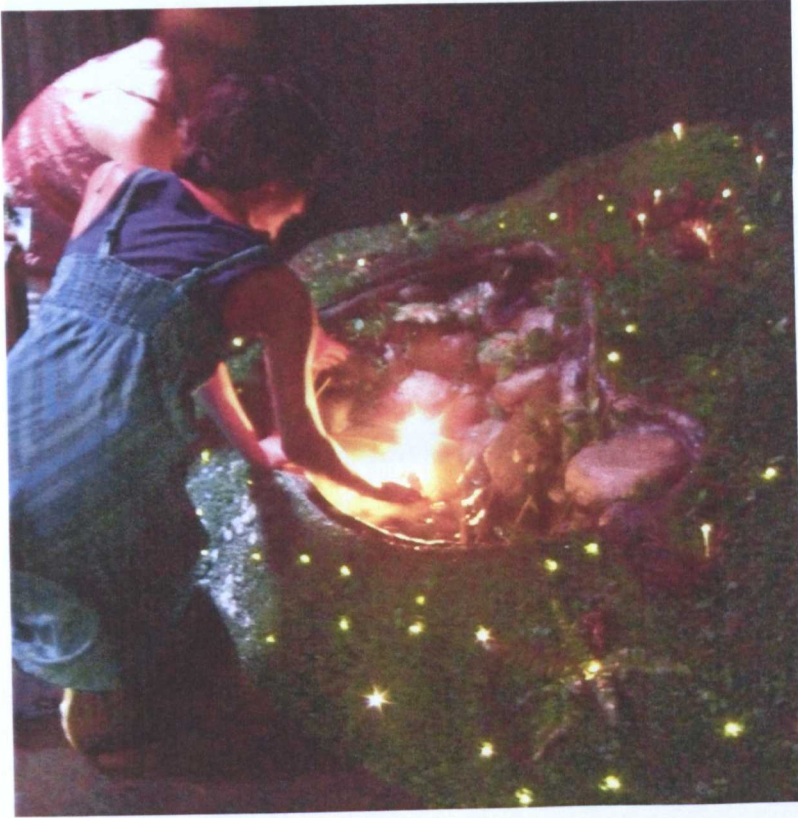
Photograph of page of Tone Script for *White Peacock*



Appendix 5

Photographs of the dress rehearsal of *White Peacock*

Phoebe explores the pond



Sam and his tree



Underneath the tree canopy



In the den



Sam crying



The kiss



Sam's dream



Celebration



Appendix 6

Companion Feedback Sheet

Name of student.....

Name of companion.....

Not engaged = no ticks
Almost engaged = 3 one tick
Engaged = 2 ticks
Very Engaged =3 ticks

Excitement (storm)

Sadness (fallen tree)

Love (kiss)

Happiness (Bollywood)



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