

CHAPTER THREE

Playback Theatre: Research Debates, Origins and Contemporary Movements

From childhood men have an instinct for representation, and in this respect man differs from the other animals in that he is far more imitative and learns his first lessons by representing things. And then there is the enjoyment people get from representations.

Aristotle, *Poetics*, IV, 2-6 (in Fyfe 1954:13)

Introduction

This chapter considers all the located literature on Playback Theatre and is organised in five sections. These five sections represent the origins and development of PBT, foregrounding those who developed the form, and how it has been applied, extended, and practiced. Section one traces PBT from its inception to its present-day manifestation through the writings of Jonathan Fox and Jo Salas, the co-founders of PBT. These publications, therefore, represent some of the most important theorising about PBT by two of its progenitors who have been responsible for most of the training, development and articulation of PBT, its theory and practice. In section two, the two currently available PhD theses that refer to PBT will be described and elaborated to provide a context in which it can be better explained. These two theses reflect a development of hybrid-forms and a socially-critical perspective respectively.

Section three discusses *Interplay*, the international newsletter of the International Playback Theatre Network (IPTN). The development of *Interplay* represents the spread of PBT internationally. In this section, established ideas with regard to PBT are reviewed, and emergent issues and concerns within the PBT community are identified. Section four introduces a number of perspectives from the Kassel symposium (Fox & Dauber 1999). This symposium was the first to focus on PBT as a distinctive form, and reflects the development

of this form's academic standing, with PBT being linked with broader research communities. Consequently, the symposium provided an important forum for thinking about PBT's emerging theory and practice from both scholars and practitioners worldwide. Thus, these perspectives reveal new and increasingly deep thinking about PBT.

Section five describes the three located refereed articles on PBT, which not only provide a reflection of the development of PBT over time, but also reveal music as a hitherto unexplained component. Finally, this chapter concludes with comments that identify the larger current themes in PBT, and indicate as worthy of further consideration some areas that have not presently been considered in the literature⁹.

Pre-eminent Thinkers in Playback Theatre

One of the most important thinkers and practitioners in PBT is Fox (1982; 1992b; 1994; 1999a; 1999b), and of most importance in tracing the development of PBT is his 1994 volume. This book is important for two reasons. First, Fox is credited with the development of PBT, so the volume documents his influences and the context within which it developed. Secondly, the volume is the first substantial text devoted solely to PBT and the elements that comprise it.

Fox discusses the nature of Orality as embodied by the oral poets of Greece and the wandering bards of later times, and uses the concept as a context to discuss *oral* theatre. Oral theatre, as he describes it, existed predominantly in "traditional" cultures as story-telling and shamanistic ritual to assist in forming and maintaining social bonds. Fox contrasts this traditional medium with the more modern literary theatre that relies almost exclusively on a script. Thus, oral theatre had elements of ritual and performance, and served a variety of purposes. These purposes consisted not just of entertainment, but also functioned as "repositories of cultural knowledge" (Fox 1994:16); that is, the history of a people could be told—a history that transmitted a moral imperative. In this sense, oral theatre had an educative function, and Fox's discussion of the nature of Orality emphasises this point. In short, Theatre as Learning is not a new idea.

⁹ It is also important to acknowledge that PBT owes a significant debt to Psychodrama. Furthermore, there is a substantial body of literature on Psychodrama, and in comparison a small academic and professional literature on PBT. However, as the former is concerned predominantly with psychological theorising it was not appropriate for close examination. I do, however, in Chapter Five, briefly consider Psychodrama as a way of revealing the healing potential of PBT.

According to Fox, PBT is born from the mould of Orality. As such, it is a form of nonscripted theatre. Since PBT is a member of this family tree, it is characterised by a number of features in common with other nonscripted theatre forms. That is, PBT:

- 1) Focuses on improvisation and spontaneity as opposed to the written word;
- 2) Does not have a “fourth wall”; that is, a line of demarcation between the actors and the audience;
- 3) Focuses on the process of a performance; that is, it allows its actors the freedom and action to create, as opposed to focusing on a inviolable written text and final aesthetic product.

These three features define the unique and provocative nature of the Playback theatrical experience as having particular social and aesthetic features—an idea developed throughout the thesis. This experience stands in stark contrast to modern theatre, where the nature of the experience depends heavily on text and special technical effects.

Fox also describes the role of nonscripted theatre production generally and PBT specifically. In his description, he discusses those elements of spontaneity and role flexibility needed by actors, musicians and the conductor¹⁰ in a PBT performance. These elements are important because they provide powerful role models to the audience and give them licence to adopt them in their own lives. Fox also highlights the point that since Playback has an affinity with preliterate or oral theatre, nonscripted theatre does “depend on language for communication of its meaning”(Fox 1994: 183). Language is the medium in which people communicate ideas—which humans weave into stories that transmit values and social ideals. These stories give shape and structure to experience, and become a way of explaining that experience. In short, story lies at the heart of all theatre, and PBT, at its essence, is concerned with the transformation of personal story into theatre.

Salas, a founding member of the original Playback Company, wrote in 1996 an equally important book on PBT. For Salas, PBT is part-therapy, part-theatre, part-community building and part-storytelling. However, Salas regarded the therapeutic aspect of PBT as the most important. Salas’ training and background as a Music Therapist led her to understand the

¹⁰The conductor, who is half-director and half-actor, plays a crucial role in PBT. This role is to act as a form of Master of Ceremonies, and also to have responsibility to facilitate the story-telling by the audience and act as an intermediary between the actors/musician and the audience. It is the role of conductor, and the ritual associated with that role, that provides the “safety net” in a performance.

dimension of healing in the personal stories rendered in PBT. She believed that during the Playback, it was the *transactions* of the actors that allow the audience and the teller to see the story from a different point of view. Salas also explained that the transactions and the expression of emotion, and the social interactions between the actors, allowed the problem and issues of the story to be seen. Thus, Salas believed, the therapeutic value of the Playback existed at a number of levels.

At its most simplistic level, Salas believes that it is the element of self-disclosure through storytelling that is therapeutic. That is, people experience a sense of relief and catharsis when they reveal their inner thoughts and feelings to others. Yet, Salas also believes that the storyteller experiences a sense of value as well when his or her story is told, because the story's transformation into art is valuing and empowering. Third, Salas describes the public nature of the storytelling event as therapeutic. That is, when others witness a storyteller's problem, there is a sense of community as bonds are constructed between members of the group, the audience and the storyteller. Finally, Salas contends that the therapeutic value of PBT can be seen in the context of its capacity to move each person toward his or her fullest humanity. Salas uses the term humanity to refer to the openhearted connection that can emerge between people in a group, and the spontaneity and creativity that is the "birthright" of humans.

Thus, "healing" in PBT, Salas contends, comes from a number of elements. First, the need to tell stories is a unique part of the human condition. Secondly, the atmosphere of trust and respect that exists in PBT has a healing effect, because the atmosphere is safe, nurturing and accepting. Finally, the stories are responded to in an artistic way that endows them with an aesthetic form (1996:112). This aesthetic dimension, enhanced through the ritualistic frame of PBT, gives form or shape and structure to experience. It is this shaping and structuring of experience that leads to the creation of meaning, and furthermore, it is meaning, and the depiction of meaning in aesthetic form, that are essential to art. Meaning, Salas goes on to argue, when presented as an integrity of form, is in itself "a fundamental and profoundly

affirming agent of healing” (p.113). Thus, for Salas, Healing and Art are both integral aspects of PBT¹¹.

While the healing capacity for PBT was of critical importance to Salas, it is the structure of PBT that provides for the healing to emerge. This structure evolved out of a vision originally articulated by Fox as a commitment to “the flowering of the human spirit” (Salas 1996:111). This vision, and the structure that has evolved to support it, is built on three premises. First, there is a basic human need to tell stories, and at its best, Playback provides a non-judgemental forum where stories can be told. Secondly, respect, where the act of honouring the teller and his/her story endows the individual with a sense of status, and provides recognition and affirmation. Finally, the aesthetic form, which links the theatrical process and art, is in itself capable of eliciting feelings, as well. That is, the actors and musician, who work to create the art form out of the teller’s story, in effect give an aesthetic representation to a person’s life experience. This, in itself, says to the teller, “your life, your experiences, are worth making art about” (Salas, 1996:111). In short, the structure of PBT is comprised of storytelling, a focus on the storyteller, and an artistic transformation of the teller’s story.

The structure of Playback can further be defined by the concept of ritual, where a frame is provided around the teller’s experience, and the audience is inducted into his or her world. It is the role of these rituals in PBT that are of particular importance to Salas. She believes that rituals are the patterns that provide a “consistent framework throughout the performance and from one show to another” (p.97). The constancy of the rituals is important because this provides a context of stability and familiarity around the unpredictability of dramatic action. Thus, these rituals function to create frames for the teller¹² and audience that facilitate transformation of the audience’s experience of the PBT itself. Furthermore, this transformation is facilitated by the atmosphere of trust, sensitivity and respect for the teller that is established by the Conductor and maintained by the actors.

¹¹ Parenthetically, Salas no longer uses the term therapeutic value in relation to PBT. She believes the term “therapy”, as it is used in a secular sense, actually implies a contractual relationship between a therapist and a client in the context of a treatment goal. Thus, she has replaced the term with the concept “healing”, because healing has broader implications than therapy and fits more aptly in to the broader context of theatre as a form of art (Salas, J. 1997, pers. comm., 2 November).

¹²The teller is the person who volunteers to tell a story to the conductor, and sits with the conductor as their story is “played back” to both the teller and the audience.

The rituals used in PBT also are seen to have a secondary role in this transformation of experience. This role is the induction of a “liminal state” where there is a suspension of disbelief in the drama (Schechner & Schuzman 1976). This suspension of disbelief is evident when an audience allows itself to believe that the action it sees on stage is real even though it is only an imitation of reality. This “half-way” place between reality and fantasy is similar in many ways to the trance-like state induced by shamans in a shamanistic ritual. It is in this place, Salas argues, that members of the audience are most open to their creativity.

The liminal state is important for PBT for a number of reasons. However, it is the ritualistic aspects of PBT that induce an altered state of being, and hence, an altered frame of reference for both the teller and the audience. This liminal state emerges because of the ritualistic nature of the PBT structure and is induced by the “heightened” language used by the conductor to signal a change in roles, the use of repetition of key phrases to give emphasis, the actors’ use of the performance space and music, and the use of minimal props. These are manifestations of ritual, and are summoned to create frames so as to transform experience for the teller.

In addition, it is the functional aspects of the ritual, according to Salas, that are most important for their healing value. For Salas, this healing is linked to the emotions that are evoked when one is actually “heard”. It is because one’s emotion are interpreted, given perspective, and reflected in language, movement and sound that the self is valued and healed. This process allows the teller to understand the emotion from an external point of view at multiple levels of representation. That is, the multiple levels are akin to the facets of a diamond; the teller may only see one facet of the diamond before the theatre begins, but once the dramatic action unfolds, the artistic representation allows the gem to revolve and be perceived more holistically. While Salas does not directly discuss this point of view, this is in essence what becomes important about Salas’ notion of healing through PBT. Hence, the structure of PBT is ritualistic. It is important to note that there are features in a ritual that go beyond its framework or structure to resonate in some way with the human psyche. The PBT structure is further described in Appendix A.

These rituals serve to contain and transform the teller’s experience, and Salas directly links this transformation of experience with notions of “healing”. She goes on to argue that it is through the rendering of personal story as art, that is, in a “play back” experience, that “healing” might begin. Although Art does not change the facts, the “pain could, to some

degree, be redeemed by the experience of seeing it transmuted into something organized and artistically rendered” (Salas 1996:x).

In summary then, Salas makes an explicit claim that healing in PBT comes from a focus on the great richness of the story, where its events are ritualistically framed, with the teller’s subjective experience of the events made public and revealed.

Related Thinking on Playback Theatre: PhD Studies

There are only two quasi-related PhD theses that consider PBT. Each of these is revealing in different ways. In the first, Lucal (1995:i) describes “Emergent Drama” as a means for “crystalizing meaning from the psychological field of an individual or group”. This quest has its parallel in research on PBT, and while Emergent Drama is not PBT by another name, an extensive analysis of Emergent Drama by Lucal suggests a deeper way of understanding PBT itself.

In this thesis, Lucal (1995) considers notions of story, healing, ritual and subjective experience as constituent elements of Emergent Drama. Emergent Drama is defined by Lucal as “the unfolding of subjective experience through artistic dramatic expression”, where one or more actors spontaneously enact “images, feelings, stories (and) impulses” (p.3). Lucal suggests that over the last 300 years the Western world has been dominated by a “rational, materialistic, reductionist perspective”, where the body and soul have been left behind in a quest for “intellectual and technological advancement” (p.4). Emergent Drama, Lucal contends, is a way of being open to subliminal sources of knowledge about one’s self and one’s place in the world. This openness is achieved through the spontaneity and vitality offered by Emergent Drama as an action-orientated method. This openness, Lucal argues, is in direct contrast to a solely rational way of knowing about one’s self and world. Thus, Emergent Drama’s focus on self-knowledge and our place in the world is educative, and as such, parallels PBT.

A consideration of the characteristics of Emergent Drama process reveals much of PBT’s educative potential. First, I will describe the characteristics of Emergent Drama, and then I will highlight how those characteristics illuminate PBT.

Emergent drama has the following characteristics:

1) It involves an emergence of material from the invisible to the visible and manifest. This means that in Emergent Drama the “text”¹³ of the performance, that is the material that is enacted, comes from inside the individual rather than from an external source. In this sense, there is an infinite range of potential material. This emphasis on the individual generating his or her own material is also true in PBT where an audience member tells a story from his or her own life.

2) Emergent Drama is a highly context-sensitive, cooperative creation. Here Lucal highlights the importance of the group within which the drama is produced. This group, and the affect of that group, determines much of what unfolds in a dramatic session. Allied with this affect is the cooperative nature of the creation. Implicit in this co-creation is the openness of the participants to each other and what is presented through the drama. Lucal goes on to detail some of the benefits of this type of process, specifically: “a heightened experience of belonging, the affirmation of identity, and the boon of new understanding” (p.11). PBT similarly uses the group process to support the teller, and facilitate the integration of new understandings. In this sense, PBT has potential to build community.

3) Emergent Drama is a ritualised process. In this third characteristic Lucal brings to the foreground the importance of ritual in what is a seemingly unstructured and improvised form of working. It is important to note, however, that even though the dramatic action is spontaneous and unrehearsed, there is a structure that contains the enactment. That structure is the rituals of beginning, unfolding of dramatic action, and ending. Without these invariant rituals it is highly likely that the dramatic action would descend into chaos.

The rituals of Emergent Drama also serve a secondary purpose of inducing an altered state of consciousness, both for the actors and the audience. This altered state is induced by the conductor, and then developed by both the musician (who provides a bridge between the cognitive and the affective modes in the audience), and the actors. It is the actors who most visibly participate in this process through the assumption of roles, moving in and out of these roles, and working “as if” the dramatic world is real. In this “as if” world, subjective experience is heightened, and the audience moves towards emotional engagement with the

¹³Text, when used in this context, refers to meaningful action. Ricoeur (1981) discusses the pairing of text and event, where text gives shape to experience. In nonscripted theatre this usually takes the shape of some form of story. Halliday (1973), coming from a linguistic perspective, has another view where text is conceived of as a meaning unit.

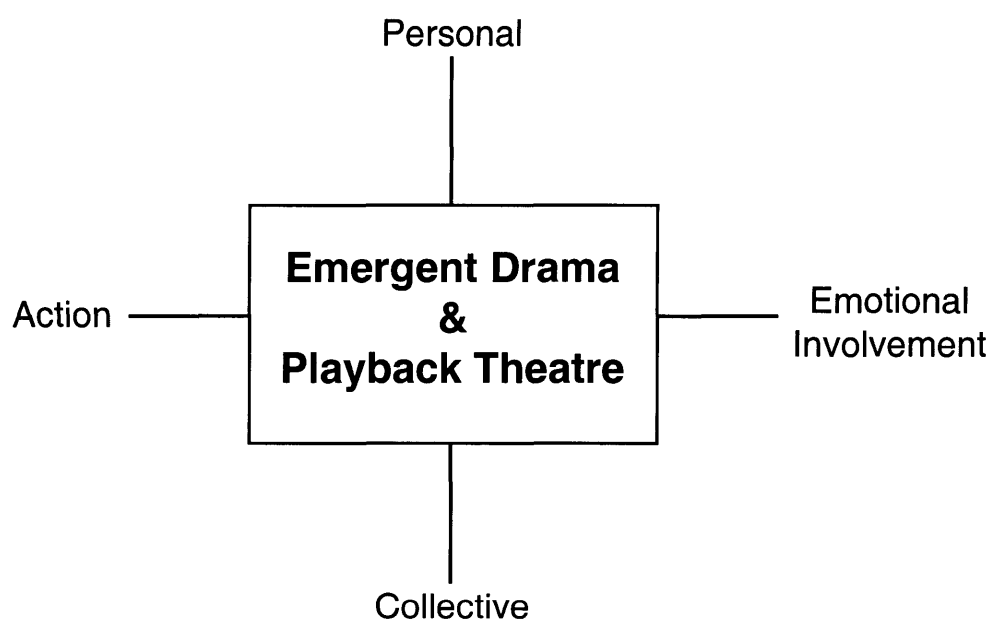
dramatic action. It is also possible to see ritual functioning in a similar way in PBT. That is, ritual both contains the dramatic action, and induces a liminal state within the audience.

4) Emergent Drama is generative and renewing for participants. Participation in this form of drama involves a journey of discovery that is both personal and collective with potential for resolution and healing. Lucal describes the benefits of this journey in terms of enrichment through the dramatic action where “a benefit can be received, a blessing bestowed, a learning nurtured, or simply connecting with others in our common humanity” (p.13).

The notion of the personal and collective is an important one. It is helpful to think of the personal and the collective, and action and emotional involvement, as two axes of both Emergent Drama and PBT. These axes are represented diagrammatically in Figure 1.

Figure 1

The two axes of Emergent Drama and Playback Theatre



In Figure 1, both theatrical forms can be seen to sit at the nexus of two dimensions. The first dimension reflects how the actions in both theatrical forms can not only emotionally involve the audience, but can also motivate an individual by an emotion to tell a story. The second dimension that identifies the importance of both the personal and collective intersects this axis. This dimension reflects not only how the individual audience member tells his/her own personal story, but also how this story expands through the act of telling and the Playback process so that the “universals” in the story are amplified, that is, come to the foreground. It is this amplification that allows other audience members to personally identify

themselves with the story told. This identification becomes a central component of the sense of community building that is an integral part of PBT.

In Lucal's (1995:33) words:

In the dramatic emergence of individual and collective processes there is a continual shifting back and forth between moments where action precedes emotional involvement and moments where the action springs from it. This continual dance of doing, feeling and imagining is a key characteristic of Emergent Drama and of life itself.

So, what is important about both Emergent Drama and PBT is that information gained through the enactment of inner experiences and stories is at once "behavioral, visual and auditory" (p.4), and occurs in a supportive, collaborative environment. This three-dimensional perspective produces a vital outcome. That is, it produces a transaction between people, allowing them to share significant meaningful experiences that can establish lasting connections between them.

Thus, Emergent Drama, as Lucal describes it, reveals both the inner life of the individual, and the group, and it is through this revelation that the group members are moved toward a better understanding and insight into their lives that leads to adaptive behaviour change. This movement, Lucal contends, enlarges the sense of "self" through activating the inner experiences of the audience. The same goal is also apparent in PBT where the teller and the audience learn more about themselves, and themselves in relation to others, through the context of the Playback.

The second PhD study is important in that its central thesis focuses directly on the educative potential of PBT. In this volume Weinstock-Wynters (1996) focuses explicitly on the power of PBT and Psychodrama to actively engage young people in constructing knowledge and making meaning in their lives.

This educational process, Weinstock-Wynters contends, reflects a pedagogy different from traditional educational practice. This new pedagogy reflects the interconnectedness of feeling and reason, and foregrounds the active role learners take in making meaning of the world around them, and their own lives. Interestingly, Weinstock-Wynters goes on to describe how this new pedagogy is informed by critical and feminist theories.

For Weinstock-Wynters, critical and feminist theories have some important elements in common. Specifically implicit in both is a consideration of the "cultural context from which students emerge as well as the different categories that define social, cultural, economic and historical significance" (p.17). In other words, in both theories attention is paid to a student's

whole sense of self and the context in which he or she exists. This notion is important for both PBT and Psychodrama because participants are not seen in isolation from the context in which they exist. As an extension to this notion, participants are encouraged not only to look at the nature of their experience, but also at their *perspective* on that experience. That is, experience is always viewed from a particular perspective that can be a delimiting or broadening factor. Indeed, Weinstock-Wynters makes the point that when the context is constrained, so too is the perspective.

Critical Feminist Theory also highlights the need to “break down the divisions that limit perceptions and end opportunities” (Weinstock-Wynters 1996:20). When these divisions are broken down, conditions can be constructed where students can consider how they use the knowledge they hold to think and behave. In turn, this consideration can motivate students to change. These pedagogical implications are important outcomes for this present research. That is, for Weinstock-Wynters, both Critical and Feminist Theories offer lenses through which to critique the individual as a whole, the context in which the individual exists, and examine how the views of the individual are derived. These theories help inform PBT where the Playback process also provides a series of lenses through which to view the self, context and perspective.

The most important idea to emerge from this Critical and Feminist pedagogy, for this present research, is that students have an active role to play in the construction of knowledge and transformation of experience. This construction also lies at the heart of the potential educational function of PBT. This is because claims of the value in PBT rest on the assumption that it enhances development of new perspectives, meanings and understanding which are constructed by participants.

The meaning-making process is not only critical in PBT, but lies at the centre of all art. That is, audiences and viewers engage in a process of making meaning out of what they see, be it a performance or a piece of art. In PBT, this process is further highlighted by the multi-modal performances associated with the form, with movement, sound, and music all employed to communicate with an audience. Hence, the performance “speaks” to a number of the audience’s senses, potentially providing a richer, more accessible, message. In short, PBT and Psychodrama attempt to speak to the whole person.

This holistic conception of a person differs radically to the traditional Cartesian view of the body-mind split, and Weinstock-Wynters argues that when “mind, body, emotion and spirit” are split, people cannot be actively engaged in the learning process as they should. That is,

Weinstock-Wynters believes that students should be “active participants in the construction of knowledge and the creation of themselves” (p.4). She also contends that the action methods of both PBT and Psychodrama are powerful because they focus clearly on the connectedness of both emotion and intellect, hence becoming significant ways for students to make meaning of their lives.

Drawing on the theatrical basis of PBT and Psychodrama, Weinstock-Wynters clearly articulates theatre as a bridge between “subjective and objective knowledge”. She also highlights the fact that theatre is both a “form of knowledge” and a “means of transformation” (Weinstock-Wynters 1996:11). In making this point, Weinstock-Wynters identifies those movements in social, improvisational and non-scripted theatre that have been part of PBT’s genesis. These movements are important as ways of illuminating PBT, and are reflected in the work of Heathcote and Bolton (1995a), Boal (1979; 1995), Johnstone (1980), and Jennings (1990).

A final notion important for this research is how Weinstock-Wynters explores other approaches to pedagogy, particularly critical feminist pedagogy, as she documents her work as a case study with a group of College students. This case-study records Weinstock-Wynter’s work to develop a “pedagogy of inclusivity” (Weinstock-Wynters 1996:44) in her classroom with her College students using the action methods of both PBT and Psychodrama. She describes the pedagogy of inclusivity as a process that actively critiques and transforms various forms of oppression or an issue, and through questions relating to power, knowledge and learning, demonstrates a commitment toward reframing the issue and applying the new perspective outside the classroom or on to the wider community as a whole (pp.43-45). This work is important as Weinstock-Wynters directly linked PBT with education and change as a form of integrated learning, furthermore, specifically focusing on how the action methods of PBT and Psychodrama impact on students’ learning experiences (p.53). Thus, in her investigation, PBT was used as a vehicle for education.

It is important to note that Weinstock-Wynters describes the meaning-making process as something more than just self-understanding or the understanding of a person’s life. Instead, she believes that understanding encompasses awareness, comprehension and reflection of broader social issues relative to the self. That is, awareness and understanding of an issue must lead to a change in a person’s behaviour towards others. Indeed, this social understanding is the focus of her investigation of the specific issue of social oppression. This

focus, and more particularly, the “inclusivity” that Weinstock-Wynters saw as an outcome of this awareness-raising, was at the heart of her teaching and investigation.

In short, the action methods of PBT and Psychodrama used in Weinstock-Wynter’s study elicited both emotional and physical responses that allowed students to “do” something with regards to both the information they took in, and the way they cognitively processed that information. Furthermore, these action methods were an important way for these students to retain information, and use their own voices in the knowledge construction process (p.85). PBT, where a participant draws equally on his or her own intellect and emotion—the heart and the head—was once again disclosed by Weinstock-Wynters (1996) as a powerful tool for learning. However, her research leaves unexplored the question of *what* is experienced, and *how* meaning is made by participants. This is the focus of the present research.

Contemporary Discussion of Playback Theatre: Newsletters of the Field

The most contemporary source of information with regard to PBT is *Interplay*, the newsletter of the International Playback Theatre Network (IPTN). *Interplay* is important as it records the development of thinking about PBT. This newsletter started in 1990, and has developed into a 16-page newsletter published triennially in three languages (English, Japanese and German). *Interplay* serves as the official newsletter of IPTN, an association of PBT performers and teachers representing 30 countries.

With the development of themed newsletters, a number of aspects already here described are revisited, emphasised and explored and new ideas emerge. In the section that follows, I will deal with each of these emerging themes in turn.

The Therapeutic Focus of Playback Theatre

The first theme most evident in *Interplay* is PBT’s focus on therapeutic value. This is particularly evident in the early years of *Interplay*. Bett (1998:6) comments on the “many therapeutic references” in early editions of *Interplay*, and conjectures that the therapeutic connection is one that has been most open to PBT. This connection is in contrast to what Bett purports to be a potential lack of “relevant writing about theatre and experiential education” (p.6). The special 1998 issue of *Interplay*, “Playback Theatre and Therapy”¹⁴ highlights the

¹⁴ March 1995, vol. V, 3

role of PBT and healing. In this issue, Salas (1998:7) describes her work with Emotionally Disturbed Children, asserting that for these children:

Telling and watching their stories helps them find mastery over chaotic and frightening experiences. We see their relief at bringing a hidden story into the public realm and perhaps discovering that others have had similar experiences.

Following Freud, and specifically his notion of catharsis, Salas reveals the healing and therapeutic potential of PBT for these children. Good (1994:6), drawing on the theories of Bion (1967), also draws a revealing analogy where she likens the experience of PBT, both for the teller and the audience, to being “held”, just like a mother holds a baby, “so that the chaotic sensations, impressions and feelings that the baby experiences are ‘contained’”. So, according to Good, the storyteller and the audience need to be metaphorically “held” by the conductor and in the minds and bodies of the actors, so that their story can become less chaotic, or changed in some way for them.

It is important to note, however, that in 1994 there was an alternative view to the focus on therapeutic value in PBT. This view argued by Kazenbach (1994) is that PBT’s “theatrical transformational vision” has been “conflated” within a therapeutic agenda. This therapeutic agenda, influenced by the many PBT actors who are Psychodrama trained, Kazenbach argues, “deadens artistry” through being covertly “moralistic and didactic”. In summing up this position, Kazenbach concludes that where morality is substituted for wonder, PBT is diminished. Apel-Rosenthal (1996:7) had a different experience:

Playback enabled me to heal the artist in me - the core of my spirit - rescuing my ‘humanity’ - recovering my tolerance, patience, accepting anger and pain as well all the joys in life. Doing Playback has been my therapy. And it even made shifts in my married life. I am taking others on their journey with Playback and enabling them to take what they need.

So, one of the issues discussed in *Interplay* is the notion that PBT is therapeutic, even though people like Kazenbach believe PBT is compromised by its therapeutic value. However, Rowe (1998:7) seems to encapsulate both positions when he states,

My feeling is that Playback brings therapy (in the sense of working to achieve authentic relationships) and theatre (in the sense of performance) into a fruitful relationship that potentially transcends both.

For Rowe, it is not a case of either/or, but rather the whole being greater than the sum of the parts. This position is revealed most recently where PBT has been used around the events of September 11th, 2001 (McClelland 2002) where “performance gave shape and form, providing a safe place for our collective feelings” (Paley 2001). Nevertheless, the points raised by Kazenbach can be more easily determined once we know more about what

participants experience, and how they make meaning, the two research questions of the present study.

Playback Theatre as Education

As all therapy can be seen to have an educative component, it is not surprising that a themed issue of *Interplay* was “Playback in Education”¹⁵. PBT and education have continuously been linked from the former’s inception. The April 1994 issue, “Talks on Education,” reported on the first education symposium at the International Playback Theatre Conference in Finland. Benson (1996), for example, looked at PBT in an instrumental way by linking it with language learning and inter-cultural education. Faisander (1992) and Fox (1992b) also explored PBT as tool for personal and social learning, with Dolmatch (1995) citing it as valuable in the service of a range of educational objectives. In all four examples PBT is described as a very powerful educational tool. Indeed, educationally, it has even found its way into organisational development, being used to teach people about relevant issues concerning urban gangs, homelessness, and AIDS. Recently, PBT and other action-based methods (Zaporah 1995) have been used in an educational program in a UK prison to teach inmates: “increased role repertoire, flexibility and tolerance of role ambivalence” (King 2000:3), and “trust” as a way of preparing pre-release prisoners to “ride the winds of change” (Bett 2000).

Despite the growing application of PBT as education as indicated above, there is still a gap in specific investigations into *what* is experienced in PBT, and *how* meaning-making derives from it, hence the importance of the present study’s focus.

Playback Theatre as Community Development

Playback Theatre has at its core social interaction and an ability to build relationships. These relationships are eminently important in the development of community. Jemima and Uma (1998:13) highlight this point when they say, “by reliving a chapter from someone else’s life, you tend to feel close to the person”. Wynters (1997) also asserted this point by amplifying the fact that all the multiple relationships in PBT are important. So, what is important in the newsletters in this period is the *social context* of PBT in terms of the construction of relationships. Relationships integrate and unite people and it is this unity that

¹⁵ November, 1996, vol. VII, 2

forms the essence of humanity. This notion of humanity has been, in the last two years, an essential feature of what concerns the PBT Community in the newsletters.

Urech (1995:7) further illuminated this common humanity in a report on the Playback Women's Company at the 1995 NGO forum in Beijing, China. Urech quoted a woman named Deborah's reflection on the group's work at the conference:

They (women) marvelled at our capacity to listen and work together. Of course this is what Playback does ... Playback Theatre seemed to be a safe haven, a still point, a place to breath and reflect, a place to cry and laugh, to be simple and ordinary, to tell my ordinary story and have it honoured.

Dauber (1998:4) made explicit the role of story in PBT, as a way of developing both "personal understanding and social community". This leads to the third major theme—PBT as community development. This theme has been developed more recently in Argentina where PBT has been used to develop a collective memory of the 1974 coup d'état and subsequent events (Garavelli 2001). It is this honouring of a simple story by a group of people that forms a sense of community. It appears that it is in the combination of all of these elements, the cultural and social, the therapeutic and educational, that PBT can be seen to have a unique role to play in forming community. This sense of community is in direct contrast to the increasing isolation experienced by the preponderance of part-time workers and tele-commuters, and this represents a real opportunity to "repersonalise" the isolates of our times.

More recent issues of *Interplay* have focused on elements of PBT. Stevenson (1998), for example, in highlighting the four shared aesthetic characteristics of both Haiku and Playback draws attention to elements of reader-response theory, an idea developed later in the thesis. First, these elements are concise, with a focus on essence and ritual, both pregnant with meaning. Secondly, everything in nature is viewed as "alive and potentially articulate" (p.3). So, PBT comes alive because Playback actors can play all ages, different genders and make inanimate objects come to life appropriate to the emotional tone of the story. Thirdly, the reader in Haiku and the audience member in PBT have a role to play in finishing the work where the audience responds to the playback, this response often informing the next story or tone of the performance. Finally, in both forms, the subjective is "overlooked" for the sake of "expressing a larger self" (p.3). This means that even though the actors may not like or agree with the teller's story, they do have a commitment and responsibility to perform that story as it was told. Although this may be a more tenuous link, this active participation in the making of meaning goes a long way in explaining the international appeal of both forms.

In another article, Fox (1999a) described a “deep” story as one where there is a sense of risk and vulnerability, both for the teller and for the Playback actors in trying to get it right. These two characteristics linked with the need for intimacy and sensitivity to the diversity that might exist in a group, and for an aesthetic environment to allow PBT’s most vital function to be achieved; that is, “not only to voice, but also to embody those aspects of [one’s] collective experience that others hide” (p.4).

In summary, the newsletters in the last five years have thematically revealed the issues of therapy, education and community building. These three issues have been well addressed by Salas and Fox elsewhere. The other issues discussed in the section above are new and emergent, and will possibly shape developments in the field over the next few years. It is timely that such theoretical developments be accompanied by empirical study, and it is in this area that the present research aimed to make a contribution.

The Kassel Symposium: An International Perspective

In 1997, the first academic symposium to focus exclusively on PBT occurred at the University of Kassel, Germany. This symposium was significant because the focus was exclusively on PBT as an object itself. The papers presented there, along with those that had their genesis at the symposium, were collected into a volume edited by Fox and Dauber (1999). This volume represents significant thinking and practice in PBT from six countries.

Fox (1999), in the Foreword, names a number of themes emerging from the symposium. First, he underscores the importance of “trance” in Playback, suggesting that the trance state developing from improvisation makes the medium of Playback unique, noting also the importance of “trance” or altered state of consciousness in the audience. Secondly, he emphasises that theory development and good research practice have the potential to enhance the Playback form. Next, Fox notes that the symposium dealt specifically with a recurring debate among Playback experts—that is, that the world may be more or less open to dealing with truth as it gets revealed in PBT. Indeed, he observes that PBT is currently performed in 30 countries and 200 locations around the world. Thus, the controversy stems from the question of whether “modern society [is] becoming more or less open to bearing witness to truth?” (Editors’ Foreword). Finally, he noted the diversity of practices and form.

Of interest is Fox’s overview of PBT’s historical development. Fox discusses his belief in, and ongoing commitment to, PBT as being “immediate”, “for any and everybody”, and able to “take place anywhere” (1999:9). This belief has heavily influenced PBT’s genesis and is an

ethos that is still clearly evident today. He also highlights the debt that PBT owes to Psychodrama, both in the influence of Moreno's "Stegreiftheater" (1946; 1972:4-5) and in the actors that Fox initially sought to bring the necessary conditions of respect, spontaneity and empathy to this work. He further suggests that Stegreiftheater was important because it encapsulated notions of community theatre, artistry, and emotion in a way that made a difference for those who participated in it—that it was the gestalt of these elements to which Fox so strongly responded. Indeed, for Fox, it is the interaction of Art, Psychology and Education that is the nexus from which PBT draws much of its strength. As Dauber (1999b:70) notes, Fox was highly influenced by both Freire's "pedagogy of liberation" and Illich (1971), who proposed a simpler, more community-based society in contrast to a society that was consumer driven and materialistic.

Fox also gives a current overview of contemporary practice in PBT. First, PBT continues, as it always has, as a form of Community Theatre, with regular public performances—these being the most common form of performance worldwide. Second, PBT has been performed in schools from the earliest days. These performances have ranged from a focus on specific curriculum materials, to a concern with the engagement and validation of children's emotions and play.

Thirdly, Fox notes that PBT has been used as social service, where workshops have been offered for participants to be actively engaged with one another in the context of reciprocal understanding. It is no surprise that these workshops often have a strong educational element where specific skills such as listening and communication are taught. Fourth, PBT is frequently used as a "marker of transition" (1999:14). These transition points occur at both the beginning and end of conferences, the end of ventures and programs, and provide opportunities for participants to either anticipate what might happen in the future, or reflect on, highlight and/or consolidate feelings that may have changed or been transformed as a function of participation.

As an extension of this function of transition, Fox describes a fifth use where PBT has been co-opted as a tool to facilitate organisational development. This application heavily underscores PBT's potential as an educative form where teamwork is modelled and taught, consciousness is raised in relation to specific issues, and trainees are offered opportunities to integrate "their emotional with their cognitive responses" (1999:14). Thus, the use of PBT in business and industry is becoming an interesting development, as there is an increasing level of awareness in corporate culture of the importance of working with both feelings and ideas to

decrease absenteeism, increase productivity, and develop a higher quality of workplace life in the corporate culture. This level of awareness is reflected in the popularisation of Goleman's (1995) "Emotional Intelligence" within the business world, with PBT seen as a powerful way to develop this intelligence. Parenthetically, however, the adoption of PBT into the business world has raised questions about the degree to which it can maintain its core values of humanity in this arena—an issue that is discussed elsewhere (cf. *Interplay*).

Finally, Fox describes how PBT has been used in therapy. What is particularly important about this description is his distinction between Psychodrama and PBT. That is, he sees this difference as lying primarily in the non-threatening nature of PBT. Specifically, PBT participants are invited to tell any moment from their lives—that is embodied by the actors—no matter how small the moment may seem. In contrast, participants in Psychodrama are encouraged to tell *the* problem moment—that is represented in a scene in which they embody a role—which has the potential to be much more confrontational. Beyond Fox's ideas, the symposium indicates that PBT is a growing, burgeoning medium in which it is hoped, humans in a complicated world can begin to heal. This expansion of PBT, and its adoption in many different venues for many purposes, indicates an urgent need for scrutiny and evidence regarding the *what* and *how* of PBT. The present research undertakes such a task in a relatively small way.

Of particular value in the Kassel volume are chapters by Salas, Fox, and Dauber. Salas' chapter, 'What is "Good" Playback Theatre', valuably highlights the idea that PBT is both theatre and an interactive social process. It is this social process that enables PBT to provide a "service to its audience" as a goal that differentiates PBT quite distinctly from most other theatre events (Salas 1999:18). Salas elaborates on the value of the social process by making the point that PBT conveys human experience by enacting the experience in a distilled form. That is, PBT takes the experience of audience members, converts the experience into a story format, and enacts that story in an artistic way. Thus, Salas explicitly links PBT with Art. What is important about this link is that it reveals how PBT is capable of conveying meaning beyond the individual stories that are told.

By thinking of the value of PBT in terms of both the process of social interaction and art, Salas is able to explicitly define what makes "good" PBT. That is, "good" PBT is dependent on both *artistic* and *social* criteria. This theorising helps us to understand about the power of PBT as art to engage, move and educate its audience, and by way of contrast, to determine when it is not art. That is, when PBT does not seem to "work", a consideration of both artistic

and social criteria can help to reveal why. These two issues, that is, the power of PBT to engage both the audience members artistically, and awareness of the context in which this engagement occurs, underlie the concerns of the present research and lie at the heart of this thesis.

PBT, as art, is concerned with the representation and making of meaning. But, as Salas points out, PBT is not *always* “art”. That is, PBT does not always represent or reveal artistic patterns of human existence beyond the immediate story that is told. Still, “good” PBT *is* dependent on both the interaction of artistic excellence created by the conductor, actors and musician and Playback as an “interactive social event”. Thus, while PBT as a whole is contingent upon artistic excellence and certain social criteria, actors who do not necessarily have well-refined artistic skills can make PBT successful in some circumstances. That is, Playback success is possible when the actors have the skills to listen, attend and be spontaneous. Furthermore, the actors’ ability to convey and experience compassion and empathy towards the teller, and feel a sense of connectedness with the teller, audience and each other, can make PBT quite effective as well. In fact, Fox (1999b:119) underscored this point, “One of the strongest features of PBT is that it allows diverse voices to be heard in a context of empathy.” Thus, PBT unequivocally embodies humanity and community as well as art. Indeed, it is the function of art both to integrate and comprehend individual and communal experience and to reveal meaning.

Salas (1999:20) describes those elements of art that most strongly combine to “create in its audience the strongest experience of revelation of meaning”.

These elements include order (in the sense of purposeful design), an integrity of form with some kind of internal cohesiveness, the presence of originality, a high degree of execution, evidence of conviction and inspiration on the part of the artist, and the ineffable sense that the work of art speaks of a reality beyond its own scale”.

Salas also discusses those elements that make social events successful:

- 1) Planning and organization;
- 2) awareness of the time frame and the physical environment in which the event will happen;
- 3) acknowledgment of individuals and diverse concerns early on;
- 4) qualities of respect, combined with the engagement and participation of those present; and
- 5) a sense of closure associated with the achievement of goals.

These elements are so important that they now comprise part of the ritual frame of PBT worldwide. If they go unattended, the audience is left devoid of the opportunity to develop trust, community, and compassion. This renders impossible the value of PBT to convey itself as a medium of insight and art—or more correctly, the insight that comes from art.

What “good” PBT, as described by Salas, has to offer, then, is a unique way to preserve humanity’s common cultural heritage. That is, PBT can do more than just help the individual learn about the self and self in relation to others. Indeed, the German scholar Dauber (1999b:74), reflecting on the substantial drift of (often) Jewish scholars to the United States before the Second World War, argues that PBT offers a unique opportunity for German speakers to reclaim their lost humanitarian traditions. This reclamation occurs, Dauber suggested, through PBT’s natural affinity with the “preliterary forms of collective cultural self-reflection” (p.74). The reclamation occurs in both an individual and group-based way, and involves both affect and cognition. Hence, when all four elements are involved (the individual, the group, and the individual’s affect and cognition), PBT can be seen as a “culture of remembrance” (Feldhendler 2001). Indeed, this quaternary makes for powerful learning, and PBT, used in this cultural way, is a powerful educational medium. Dauber (1999b:74) described it this way:

The stories told in Playback Theatre are the most alive form of such individual and collective self-reflection that I know: Playback mobilizes the whole person, and allows one to form thoughts, feelings, and impressions in a bodily expression that connects individual and collective experiences in a unique way.

The value of Fox’s chapter, “A Ritual for our Time,” is fourfold. First, Fox identifies clearly the “storied-ritualistic” nature of PBT. That is, PBT sits firmly in the disciplinary field of Narrative. What Fox (1994) does for the first time is to link the storied nature of PBT with its rituals. For example, he emphasises that Playback stories *are* stories, and like ritual, they have a beginning, middle and end. Furthermore, these stories also have the elements of “setting, character, plot, and image” (p.119). These elements are also generally apparent in ritual and, indeed, Schechner (1993) highlights these elements as defining ritual in the future as well as the past. What makes the playing back of stories in PBT different from oral story is that the stories played back have more emphasis on the affective, and less on the cognitive realms. This means that the “feelings” element of the story is emphasised. This change in emphasis is achieved through a focus on movement rather than words as a way of communicating the essence of the story. This emphasis on movement and feelings can again be seen to parallel ritual.

Linked with this focus on movement is the point emphasised by Fox that in PBT, as in story generally, the meaning or value of a playback story may only be revealed indirectly. Hence, there is often a level of abstraction in PBT. This abstraction, where there is a focus on the metaphorical and symbolic rather than the literal, also adds a certain degree of ritualistic power to PBT. This power can be seen in the audience's active involvement in constructing a meaning and interpretation of the story.

Thirdly, PBT works through a variety of senses. There is an emphasis on the symbolic, which opens up the audience's sensual awareness and emotion. This awareness and emotion—smelling the smells, hearing the sounds, feeling the touch of the enactment—enables the audience to be truly present in the experience in a holistic way. In other words, PBT reflects wholeness in its approach to communication, whereby audience members are immersed in the experience in a profound and personal way. The result of this wholeness is that PBT “penetrates our consciousness in a particularly profound manner” (Fox 1999b:120), and as such, is a potent tool for learning. Indeed, it is in the richness of the Playback experience sensually and emotionally—the sensory perception; the iconic thinking—that it is possible to see the links between PBT and ritual, oral tradition and awareness.

It is also important to recognise that this holistic form of communication occurs in a social setting, so that PBT not only has individual but also group benefits. Fox described it this way: “The process of identifying one's own story and witnessing another's often leads to a feeling of communal renewal” (p.121). These benefits are perceivable in the body of the teller, a sense of connectedness with others, and a heightened awareness of the senses.

Fourthly, Fox describes “good” PBT as necessarily drawing on elements of ritual. For him (1999b:163), the abilities to keep to rules, manage ecstatic emotion, attend to the transpersonal dimension and use spellbinding language are equally important as the artistic and social interactive domains. What this interaction (between ritual, art and the social) highlights is some of the binary opposites that exist in PBT. These opposites work to create tension and the resolution of tension is a common goal of all theatre. That is, good PBT is not only dependant on the aesthetic distance of art, but also the emotional involvement of ritual; the informal nature of social interaction, but also the transpersonal intensity of ritual; and, the development of trust with an audience, but also the shamanistic “enchantment” that can lead an audience into a liminal state. In other words, a consideration of ritual's function reveals a

complexity of PBT that would not be apparent if the artistic and social domains were considered separately.

Fox also highlights for the first time that PBT *creates* ritual, and so is not merely mechanistic and reproductive. PBT is not merely the retelling of a story, but rather a transformation of it. Transformation is important because it is the cornerstone of perspective that provides insight and understanding. In short, understanding cannot be conveyed mechanistically.

Still, transformation requires skills other than just expressive and group-process. These skills combine “an invocation of a transpersonal dimension, an adherence to rules of conduct, building ecstatic emotional energy, the sparse, rhythmical, highly specialized use of language, and a goal of transformation” (p.126). That’s why for Fox PBT’s grounding in ritual allows it to flourish in so many different cultures, with widely differing traditions. That is, it is the ritual in PBT that is the constant, both containing and sustaining the creativity and power of the Playback form. Hence, both Salas and Fox have described PBT as being at the nexus of a number of fields, namely the social, the artistic, and the ritualistic.

Dauber (1999a) indicates a further dimension, in highlighting that any understanding about how PBT worked must not only include the three aforementioned dimensions, but also must consider PBT’s content. What is important about the content dimension is that it reveals that PBT must be personally meaningful as well as collectively meaningful, having artistic form and being socially integrative. Thus, PBT can be seen to have an individually subjective perspective and a collectively subjective perspective, which is a feeling response by the individual *and* the group. Dauber, in his discussions on the four dimensions, also described an individually objective perspective and a collectively objective perspective.

There are three things important about these dimensions. First, each has a part to play in helping to understand PBT; a consideration of each perspective adds new dimensions to understanding PBT itself. Secondly, it is the *intersection* of these four dimensions that is important, rather than a consideration of each in isolation—none of the dimensions can be fully considered without regard to the others. Thirdly, through describing each dimension, Dauber helps situate the present investigation of this thesis firmly across the social, ritualistic and content dimensions.

In identifying each of these four dimensions, Dauber discusses a number of criteria that reveal aspects of PBT itself. What is important about these criteria is that they help describe PBT and facilitate investigations such as the one being undertaken in this thesis and its

underlying research. First, the social dimension can be empirically investigated by considering the “interaction” or the “social/systemic fitting together” elements. The latter have been described by Salas previously as social integration. Secondly, the artistic dimension can be examined through a consideration of the “staging” in its widest sense—that is, the individual artistic elements described by both Fox and Salas. Thirdly, the ritualistic dimension reveals a collective meaning where the individual stories go beyond the here and now, yet remain connected to larger truths. Finally, the content dimension is concerned with congruence and authenticity for the individual. It appeared possible that the latter two dimensions can also be scrutinised by investigating participant response and explanation of what they experience at a PBT performance.

Dauber (1999a:164) equated this with the immediate recognition of seeing one’s own story and a subjective feeling of being truly understood. It is this dimension that underlies the notion of “gift” in PBT—an idea explored later—and “service” by the actors. In other words, PBT is personally meaningful for individuals, collectively meaningful for the audience as a whole, has an artistic form, and is socially integrative.

Academic Articles on Various Subjects of Playback Theatre

Just three refereed articles in English on PBT were located for this review. The first two of these are written by Fox (1982) and Salas (1983), and describe PBT, its elements, and its ability to build community. The third article, also by Salas (1992), describes the role of music in PBT. This article is important because music is an integral part of PBT, and is described in Salas’ article for the first time. Salas was a member of the original PBT company and is by training a music therapist; hence music has become particularly important in PBT because of “its unique power to evoke and depict feelings” (1992:14).

However, music plays other very important roles. In fact, it literally can embody a role. That is, not only can it evoke a mood, and shape a scene, it can also reflect and induce the emotional development of a story. Music, when it embodies a role, can help render the full emotional content of a story and reveal a subtext that might remain hidden to the teller and audience¹⁶.

¹⁶ Parenthetically, it is important to note that in order for music to embody a role, the musicians need more than technical skills. They require a unique set of skills that mirrors the theatrical environment of PBT where there is an emphasis on spontaneity, authenticity and the unexpected.

Finally, music also provides “bracketing” to the Playback—that is, it marks the beginning and end of a story. It also functions to move the audience from the cognitive aspects of the “telling”, to the affect of the Playback. Hence, music can be seen to induce the audience into the liminal space of PBT. Thus music contributes a variety of aspects including structural, emotional and aesthetic components that both carry and reveal meaning.

In conclusion, a fourth article by Fox (1992a), while not focussing specifically on PBT, provides an argument for a broader definition of theatre. This expansive definition is helpful in delineating the context in which PBT sits. Fox defined theatre this way: “theatre is the performance of a story by actors in role” (1992a:204). Here, he allows for a range of alternatives to the literary/aesthetic model of theatre, including both ecstatic and ritual enactment, literary theatre, and more contemporary forms of performance. Thus, PBT, with its roots in oral and improvised traditions, can be seen to be part of the broader human condition where people have tried to expressively reflect, manage and understand their world and their lives within it. As such, PBT can be seen to be part of a thread that runs from pre-history, through the present, and into the future.

The second important point about this article is that Fox, for the first time, highlights the role that language plays in nonscripted theatre (1992a:206). This role is closely linked to orality, influenced by particular stylistic conventions, and is particularly sensitive to context. Fox described it this way:

In non-scripted theatre, the ‘text’ is created according to a process close to everyday communication, involving, it seems, a spontaneous blend of direct, indirect and symbolic means, both linguistic and iconographic.

Hence language plays a critical role in connecting the drama of the Playback with the here and now of the performance, and is vital therefore in achieving PBT’s redressive purposes.

PBT, then, can be seen to have links with a variety of forms of theatre, yet with its own distinctive characteristics of purpose and language. These characteristics include a “fluid oscillation between fictive and everyday reality, communality and a deep commitment to healing both individuals and society” (Fox 1992a:207).

Conclusion

The literature on PBT reveals a developing medium of interactive storytelling that sits at the nexus of a number of disciplinary fields. These fields include Performance, Theatre and Ritual; Art and Aesthetics; Education and Health; and Narrative and Sociology. Some of these

are well described, with others still in need of further theorising. The major themes to emerge in the literature include:

- 1) A description of learning through theatre and story, both for the individual and the group,
- 2) A focus on the process of performance,
- 3) The spontaneous and improvised nature of PBT,
- 4) The structure of PBT with its reliance on ritual,
- 5) The holistic nature of communication through PBT where a number of senses are engaged,
- 6) The intrapsychic nature of PBT,
- 7) The breadth of application for PBT, and
- 8) The elements and dimensions of PBT itself.

With the articulation of these themes that describe PBT, its evolution, construction and application, it is possible then to consider what yet needs to be done in PBT research, and to conjecture about how PBT may evolve as a medium of artistic expression.

First, there is very little known about the actors in PBT. For example, how does the actor's emotional reaction to a story affect the Playback itself? To what degree are the actors individually changed as a result of an emotional story, and the embodiment of that story? Second, there are a number of issues of cultural understanding to be considered. For example, what is the degree to which the audience is informed culturally by the interpretation of the actors when they come from culturally different backgrounds and origins to the storyteller? Thirdly, what are the prerequisite conditions needed before someone can train to be a Playback actor, and what sort of training program would facilitate the development of skills and knowledge needed to be a "good" PBT actor? Fourth, how do different contexts influence the artistic form of PBT? That is, what is different in PBT between a performance in a health care setting, relative to a performance in a school or a corporate training program?

Fifth, what is the nature of the interaction between the conductor, the actors, the musician, the teller and the audience? Sixth, what are the differences between different Playback companies in the nature of their work, the cultural milieu in which they operate, and the variations in form that are apparent between them? Seventh, what functions do the various sub-forms of PBT serve? And how do they contribute to the event as a whole? Eighth, what

decisions do the conductor, the actors, and the musician make during a performance? And on what basis are these decisions made? Ninth, what impact do the developmental differences in the audience have on PBT? And as an adjunct to this, how may PBT be used to inform others in relation to these differences, for example, those who are at the end of their life span as opposed to those at the beginning, and those who are at major transition points in their development. Tenth, what are the distinct qualitative effects of the stories on the PBT experience, for example, those stories that surround palliative care, grief and dying?

Thus, while PBT has been chronicled and discussed relative to the myriad of dimensions recently studied, there are still provocative questions and issues that need to be addressed. Of these issues, the audience's experience of a PBT performance, together with the process of meaning-making has not been specifically researched despite their central importance. It was decided that these areas should constitute the foci of this thesis.

It is timely that such a study be undertaken given that PBT's emergence has reached international proportions; spawned the beginnings of serious theorising; been adopted for a wide variety of social and cultural purposes; and is making an impact through the development of hybrid and socially critical forms of PBT. This thesis particularly investigates PBT as a community of meaning through examining my own meaning-making of a performance, attempting the development of a theoretical/conceptual model, undertaking the illumination of the lived experience of its participants, and analysing how these inform an emergent theory of PBT.

The following three chapters contextualise and explicate PBT by linking it to broader research communities and locating it at the nexus of four fields—Narrative, Performance, Health and Education.

ACT II

Introduction to this Section

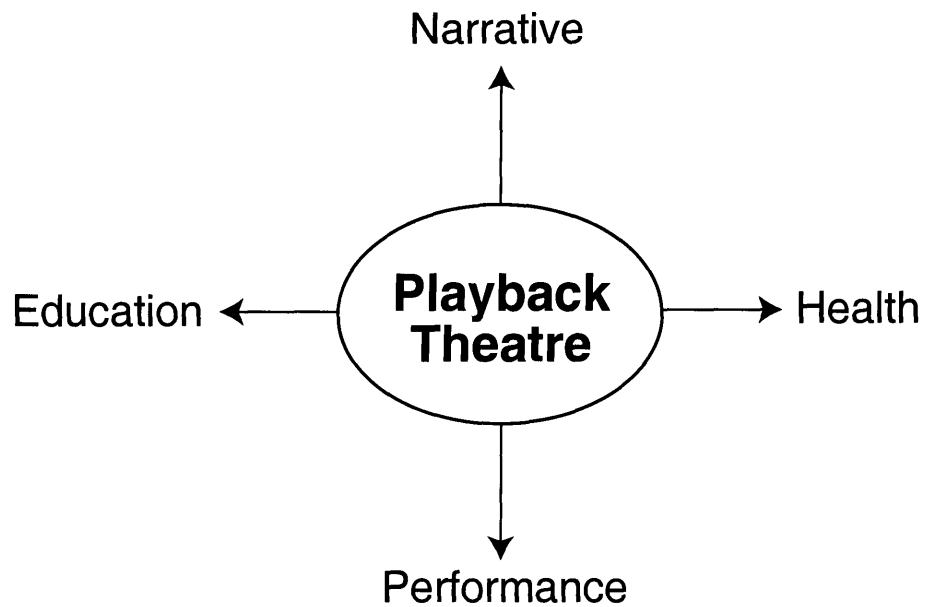
In order to facilitate the following illumination of the phenomenon of PBT through examination of relevant literature, a theoretical and conceptual model has been devised whereby the nature of PBT can be considered through the four key components of Narrative, Performance, Education and Health. The literature specifically about PBT reviewed in previous sections points to these four fields as crucial in PBT. For example, the writings continuously mention:

- The nexus between narrative (story) and performance in PBT;
- The educative, transforming and meaning-making character of PBT; and
- The increasing utilization of PBT by institutions (e.g. corporations, prisons) on the assumption that PBT has therapeutic/health benefits.

The conceptual model developed is presented as Figure 2, and will serve as a type of ‘set’ for this Act (Chapters 4, 5 and 6).

Figure 2

The fields of Playback Theatre



This theoretical model in Figure 2 indicates that PBT sits at the nexus of four fields, with one axis representing the continuum from Narrative to Performance, and the other from Health and Education respectively. This section of the thesis (Act II) comprises three chapters where this conceptual exploration takes place and PBT is linked with broader research communities. Chapter Four considers the fields of *narrative* that illuminates the storied nature of PBT, and the field of *performance* where identified characteristics of theatre and ritual are used to describe the nature and structure of PBT. In addition, the subject area of Cultural Studies is used as an additional theoretical resource to show that narrative and performance can be brought together in a new and innovative way.

Chapter Five brings the fields of health and the arts into dialogue with each other to reveal how PBT can be healing. The last chapter in this section (Chapter Six) considers education and the arts, foregrounds theorising in the arts and learning, and Drama in Education particularly, in order to contextualise and illuminate PBT as a site for learning and healing respectively.