

von Kotze, Astrid

Making beauty necessary and necessary beautiful

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Making beauty necessary and necessity beautiful

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Find a way to make beauty necessary; find a way to make necessity beautiful. (Anne Michaels, 1997, p. 44)

Abstract

The article shows how unemployed working-class women in South Africa, through collective aesthetic experiences, achieved a sense of catharsis that strengthened the resolve to work towards creating alternatives. The text is based on a series of popular education workshops that were recorded in sound and images, and interviews with individual emerging artists. It draws on theory developed in practice by workers in the nineteen-eighties when they asserted their dignity and humanity as creative subjects and demonstrates how the women, some twenty-five years later, articulate a similar defiance. The article suggests that certain preconditions must be met before the process of conscientisation through creative work can achieve its objective of preparing participants for action: repoliticise art and education by building radically horizontal relationships; create a playful third space for experimentation and generating knowledge, and encourage improvisations that allow contradictions to emerge and be examined critically.

Keywords: aesthetics; conscientisation; popular education; workshop theatre

Living precariously

Imagine the following picture: the bottom quarter of the page is dominated by a police station with a long line of stick figures next to the entrance. The building is constructed of corrugated paper and painted a dirty greenish colour. Above this is a row of houses painted pink and green into which the artist has mixed some black to make it look dirty and shabby, and above that is a large cordoned off square marked with a cross (X) and labelled 'crime scene'. Even more stick figures are assembled around this square, and as the artist explained in the presentation of her picture, 'This is a crime scene and all this



are the busy bees –cause if there’s somebody dying there is always people standing around....’.

It is a picture of Delft, entitled “Where I come from”, painted by a woman who participated in a “Women’s Health” course. Delft is one of South Africa’s first mixed race townships, established in 1989 as ‘an integrated service land project’ for “coloured” and “black” people. It is notorious for its high crime rate, substandard schools, lack of jobs, and numerous government-built housing projects. Life in Delft is characterised by violence of any kind, high rates of TB infection (exacerbated by the cramped unhealthy living conditions) depression, gang warfare and drugs peddled increasingly by young boys in exchange for gifts and money. Some 150000 people live here – some in tin-shacks, in Blikkiesdorp, under threat of being moved again to make way for airport runway extensions.

The picture resembles the other 25 women’s paintings with their focus on basic housing units, red zones of gangsterism and drug dealings, of ‘gunshots banging’ – described in previous poems constructed by the women in the room as ‘very bad places’ where ‘people must be aware of a lot of danger: be careful!’ But they are also described as places of ‘nostalgia and hardship’ – and in the small areas of blue or green amongst the grey, the women have depicted the ‘goodness, possibilities’. These are their homes and communities and much of their daily lives is invested into changing the places into more peaceful, harmonious, beautiful neighbourhoods deserving of their love and identity. The spots of light colour indicate how they wish the world to change, believing that another world is possible.

Any discussion of aesthetics and education must be prefaced by a brief explanation of the context. For the majority population, life in South Africa has become ever more precarious as day-to-day living is characterised by inadequate nutritional intake, insufficient access to decent health care, a lack of real choices as short-term coping strategies take priority over longer-term planning and as further crises and emergencies are the only predictable future. The subjects of this text belong to what Standing (2015) has called the precariat: people who do mainly unremunerated work, who network with people who may hear of casual paid jobs and wait and hope for those jobs to come along. Carpenter and Mojab (2017, p. 131) differentiate between three different groups of citizens and the women populating this text belong to the first group: ‘the everywoman or everyman, the poor, oppressed and marginalized’ who are the ‘catalysts of history and progress’. Most of them belong to a woman’s organisation, formed some 10 years ago. They meet on a weekly basis, for a variety of community projects. They are community mobilisers, and apart from the shared belief in a better life and often a strong faith, sociality, mutual support and learning are the important glue that holds them together and allows them to take action for change.

Regular sessions run by the Popular Education Programme Education are part of all their projects, and many of the women express how their weekly learning sessions are welcome interruptions in what is otherwise a fairly drab stressful existence, and how much they have grown in insights and confidence useful and necessary for their emergent local leadership roles. I have been a full-time activist with the Popular Education Programme since its inception, with a background of experimental theatre, extensive cultural work in labour unions, and academia. I have worked with most of the women since 2011, co-constructing curricula, sharing stories and laughing together.

The painting session was the culmination of a 10-week intergenerational popular education course on Women’s Health, attended by up to 40 women. Environmental health, or the lack of it, framed the course and kept the focus on collective, community health as the precondition for individual wellbeing. It was a residential weekend filled

with a morning of art-making, followed by lots of theatre exercises towards the making of short plays to be performed at the annual sponsored “16 days of activism” (against violence on women). Previously, as part of the focus on community health, the participants had written two poems: one focused on their place of residence, and the other on an imaginary place they would like to go to or create. Two years before, some of the women had workshoped, rehearsed and performed a play on domestic violence. Both the art session and the theatre work form the aesthetic experience-base of this text, and I will draw on them extensively to show how dialogical education and aesthetics can contribute towards making life more beautiful, and how they fuel the hope necessary for action for change.

In the following, I begin with a brief reference to the aesthetic praxis of theatre and cultural work in South Africa. I then describe the potentially cathartic value of the aesthetic, particularly with regards to managing trauma. A thick description of the workshop play entitled “Maria and Marius” serves as an illustration of the intersection between epistemological and ontological experience. I probe the relation between material social-economic phenomena and the women’s experience of oppression and violence and how this produces a deeper consciousness of the relation between knowing and being. A brief differentiation between “transformative learning” and “conscientisation” leads to the suggestion that only conscientisation is clearly linked to action. I conclude by postulating some “conditions” that must be met before the action component of praxis can be realised.

Aesthetic praxis of popular education, here, now

Pondering the aesthetic praxis of theatre as intervention, participation or simply aesthetic experience, Sting (2017) cites a South African colleague who had objected to the Eurocentric perspective that is quick to think in binaries, such as aesthetics vs politics, pedagogy vs art: ‘I hate your Western binary views’, s/he had said. Rather, s/he suggested, ‘questions of power should be foregrounded as these determine how hierarchies of value are established and maintained’. Sting refers to Rancière’s (2008) critique of contemporary art for reproducing top-down power relations of production, and proposing that the audience should be freed from their passive stance. I would argue that the top-down approach has been much challenged by practices in the South where bottom-up participatory processes of creation and artistic production constitute a well rooted praxis. Rancière’s forest of things and signs as the space for exploring and creating has been part of the counter-narrative in radical education practices since the anti-apartheid days. Collective workshop productions in which all participants are co-producers have a long tradition and Augusto Boal’s forum theatre (1995) that invites audiences to re-work a script and performance, is experiencing a big revival. In South Africa, theatre has been a social art both in the aesthetic production process rooted in socio-political experience and engagement, and in the pedagogic / activist intention and context of performance. (von Kotze, 1988; 2017) The social and the aesthetic cannot be separated as the one constitutes and reflects the other.

Theorizing culture in South Africa is no easy task – ‘aesthetic theorists, trained (only) in European theory have created false impressions’, as Sitas (2016, p.156) laments. He takes issue with writers whose understanding of ordinary peoples’ ‘active cultural formations as imposed culture, ignores grassroots creativity and self-determination of people and workers in defending their dignity and controlling their conditions of life’. Manji (2018, p. 3), reflecting on culture, power and resistance in Africa, reminds us how

the process of dehumanization required a systematic and institutionalized attempt to destroy existing cultures, languages, histories and capacities to produce, organize, tell stories, invent, love, make music, sing songs, make poetry, create art – all things that make a people human. This was carried out by local and European enslavers and slave owners and all those who profited from the trade in humans, not least the emerging European capitalist class.

Grassroots creativity and self-determination of people defending their dignity and taking control of their lives showed clearly that

culture is not a mere artefact or expression of aesthetics, custom or tradition. It is a means by which people assert their opposition to domination, a means to proclaim and invent their humanity, a means to assert agency and the capacity to make history. (ibid., p.5)

Performances have always had social purpose - so much so that Achebe is reported to have called art for art's sake just another 'piece of deodorized dog shit' (Achebe, 1975, p. 19). There is a deep understanding of how colonialism established and reproduced its power through attempts to eradicate, undermine, denigrate local cultures, and while much state-sponsored arts and culture reproduced imported plays, novels and aesthetic criteria, working class and Black artists, poets and performers have used cultural expressions as a way to reassert their humanity.

In recent history, culture had a clear resistance and liberation function, a means by which people asserted agency and claimed their opposition to domination. In the eighties, workers responded to the conditions of oppression (both cultural and socio-political) with what Sitas called 'defensive combinations' (Sitas, 2016, p. 81). He has pointed to the tension in the early worker plays where the expression of *khala* (crying) was both pain, lament, and grievance, complaint; both redemption and resistance. In 1986, workers preparing a talk for the trade union federations education congress (Qabula, A., Hltashwayo, M., & Malange, N., 1986, p. 59) articulated their theoretical stand clearly. Their practical, creative work had already been testimony to and illustration of this theory, making this true praxis, in the Freirean (2005) sense. They referred to an Angolan poet who described the misery of exploitation and poverty but concluded 'and yet.... they sing!' and then announced their intention, despite the difficulties, 'to control for the first time our productive and creative power'. The reason?

Because, even if we are culturally deprived as workers, we demand of ourselves the commitment to build a better world, and because we cannot abdicate, hand over the responsibility of this world to others. There are too many intellectuals, teachers, politicians and bosses ever ready to civilize us and reap all the harvest for themselves.

Since then, the workers cultural movement in South Africa took a nose dive – but there are recently attempts to revive the cultural struggle on many fronts. For the last four years, I have been making plays with unemployed workers, performing in streets, homes, community halls and churches. While all the plays have clear pedagogical and political purpose, they are also expressions of the makers' desire to be heard / seen as creative beings, expressions of the 'despite' or 'and yet' uttered in response to ongoing exploitation and oppression. Rich (2006) has defined the aesthetic 'not as a privileged and sequestered rendering of human suffering, but as news of an awareness, a resistance, which totalising systems want to quell: art reaching into us for what's still passionate, still unintimidated, still unquenched.'

In the workshops that form the basis of this text, there were examples of such defensive combinations: the attempts to portray living conditions accurately as the living hell they are, in tension with highlighting the positive aspects of communities, and thus

reclaiming decent peoples' dignity, the hope in and opportunities for a better future this will allow. When the women chose to present their artwork, one by one, they regained some of the dignity that is so undermined by their socio-economic environments and oppressive relations. They reasserted their humanity despite inhumane conditions and asserted their capacity to imagine alternatives.

The aesthetic as trauma management

Art has the capacity to remind us of something that is often kept hidden, almost invisible (that spot of blue in the pictures the women painted). It can pose alternatives to the common-sense depiction of the everyday. Asked what it had been like to make art the women said 'I felt I was back at school in the art classes having fun!', 'I was in a happy space', or 'It was good because you are letting yourself loose and enjoying everything'. Engaging with the aesthetic: making marks, expressing emotions through creativity was recognized by the women as a kind of trauma management. They felt release: 'Art is good because it makes a change inside you, not to dwell in the negative.' They articulated the sense of freedom that came with escaping the everyday, they spoke about getting lost in the moment: 'The crisis of everyday life went away because I used my hands, I painted with my fingers. I rubbed the blue onto the page!' They appreciated the opportunity to escape into another, happier reality: 'I used my hands to put the greenery onto the page because that is where I want to be.' One acknowledged how the aesthetic offers another language for communicating and reaching out: 'You do it from your inside. Emotions are important. You learn to speak them through art.' Another commented that some women who never speak had expressed themselves: 'they speak through their art.' Art was experienced as something you do to make you happy and any initial hesitations about not being able to do it gave way to the joy of doing it, of 'making a mess and feeling happy'.

One woman explained that her picture made her feel 'captured in a way that made me think', another outlined how in the act of art-making 'the three times came together: there was a transformation from the past, predicting the future. I felt I was evolving into the future.' Rich (2006) has described this as the forgotten future:

A still uncreated site whose moral architecture is funded not on ownership and dispossession, the subjection of women, outcast and tribe, but on the continuous redefining of freedom – that word now held under house arrest by the rhetoric of the 'free' market. This on-going future, written-off over and over, is still within view. All over the world its paths are being rediscovered and reinvented.

When the women presented their pictures (and previously their poems) to each other they enabled a getting-in-touch-with forgotten or lost landscapes but with a focus on the bit of colour in between the bleak; they evoked the colours and scents, the movements and sounds of lost pasts – richly sensory experiences. There was a lot of spontaneous storytelling and thick descriptions of past experiences in response to pictures of Bokmakieriestraat or the crime scene in Delft. The often cautious distrustful hesitation with each other arising from self-blame or deep feelings of deficits, made way to identifying ugliness as existential contextual commonalities.

Greene (2005, p. 79) has outlined the process of art-making as creating impulses that point to alternatives. This, she suggested, was the importance of the imagination: to reach beyond what is, towards the not-yet:

When it comes to decisions of what we ought to do, there is always a space between the 'is' and the 'should.' It is the space of hesitancy, perhaps, of imagining what might follow after, a space of reflection, of consideration. If we ponder in the light of 'I' and 'Thou', there is bound to be a kind of breathlessness, a straining to reach across a space in order to transcend. And if we try, above all, to move ourselves and those we teach towards a dialogue that may lead to understanding and perhaps to resolution, we may have to break through spaces of silence in order to communicate, to come authentically 'face to face.'

The story-telling led to imagining other futures: women expressed how they wanted for their grandchildren what they had had as children. The pictures awoke the longing and also triggered imagining the possibility of that other reality, one in which relationships were close and kind. It seemed a moment of healing, of catharsis, had been reached when suddenly one woman began to hum, then sing, and one by one they picked up the tune and burst into singing and harmonising. They were songs of believing in miracles, songs of free spirits rising, songs of beauty and freedom. There was laughter, a lightness of being and being together that we had not experienced before. The songs gathered the past in the present, towards the future, and the individual into the collective. The magic of creating art had momentarily transformed their reality. As hands crafted images they became aware of their ability to make something colourful and beautiful, and when heart and head, emotions and thinking helped to articulate the process there was a sense of wholeness.

The potentially cathartic value of the aesthetic has a long history particularly associated with African music. Strong rhythms, drums, singing, dance are part of any collective rituals as much as healing ceremonies performed by traditional healers (sangomas) and they offer cathartic as much as aesthetic experiences. Having made their mark on a page as a way of asserting their presence and agency, the women depicted their everyday living conditions and then literally breathed a sigh of relief, and, in a moment of restoration, cleansing, found their voices.

But radical feminist popular education wants to pay attention to the material relations in which we live, in tension with the ruling ideas that continue to maintain domination. What about the importance of participants relating their daily experiences to the history of the country, to global capitalism, to the way the world is organised so that their class, race and gender relations keep them "down"? Carpenter and Mojab (2017, p. 30) have explained that understanding dialectically means to see something 'through the lens of its historical emergence, to see the way in which it appears in daily life, and to seek out an explanation of why it appears the way it does in order to understand the essence of the contradictions that form social phenomena.' Beyond setting up creative aesthetic processes, I also saw my role as educator to support critical questioning so that participants would see how everyone and everything is connected. Herein would lie the possibility of action for social change.

Aesthetic experiences and (critical) education

Clover and Sanford (2013, p. 7) have written that contributors to a book on lifelong learning, the arts and community engagement all believe

in the potential of aesthetic and creative practices and methodologies to advance the common good, promote human and cultural development and change, reinvigorate research and society and provide a space and opportunity for adult learners, students or community members to creatively and critically engage with and reimagine the world as a better, fairer and more healthy and sustainable place.

Similarly, Irani (2018) writing about grassroots leadership development in Afghanistan suggests that

(T)heatre as a method of engagement and leadership development allows analytical and aesthetic faculties to work together so that individuals can rehearse and remember the complex weave needed to make a new social order — not simply one group being allowed to dominate the other. In such a space, artists and culture workers can offer hope, build agency, and create a space where dialogue can occur, new possibilities are imagined, and actions are initiated toward change.

One illustration of this belief, hope-building and agency is the play “Maria and Marius”, workshopped and performed collectively with women from Delft, in 2016. The story-line emerged through personal narratives and improvisations over 4 months; it was turned into a basic script which formed the guideline for performances, but much of it remained improvised in response to specific audiences or fluctuating performers. The process involved weekly meetings attended by anything of up to 30 women (and sometimes a man). We established a pattern: beginning with checking in and catching up chats in small groups, we did a series of physical exercises followed by the introduction of a theme for the day which generally arose from the check-ins: tales of violence, concerns about drug and gang-related action, worries about children became the starting point for often silent enactments. Improvisations were unpacked and the dialogue turned into a critical investigation of the visible and invisible forces behind conflicts, teasing out hidden interests, but also collusion and culpability. For example, 3 women improvised a scene in which a drug-deal is negotiated outside a home, while 2 women observe through the window (an empty picture frame). The drug-deal goes wrong, one man is shot, the others run. The injured drags himself to the door of the house and asks for help – yet the women will not open the door. Questions arose: Is this a common occurrence? What happens when people deny their humanity by not helping others? We ask questions about relationships and power between inside and outside a home, amongst women and between women and men, young and old etc.

Most of the women in the room had personally experienced situations of violence frequently, but remained silent about them. There was acknowledgement of others’ traumas as familiar and the women supported one another with a hug, a squeeze of the others hand etc, but rather than recycling the hurt through endless sharing of familiar stories, participants made the connection between their individual, personal stories and the broader socio-economic, political conditions which are considered normal for Delft. They shifted from asking ‘what happened?’ to ‘why does it happen?’ They confronted difficult claims that they themselves were to blame for violent incidents, and questions about their own collusion by not speaking out.

We often worked in silence exploring the language of bodies, and experimented with whispering, soft murmuring etc.. We analysed how silence might be both the refusal to speak, or a fearful response to threats. We explored new normalities and forms of interaction – and this new tension-of-silence, and the menacing effect it can have, later formed the basis of a scene in the play that portrayed the threatening and brutal behaviour of husbands towards wives while claiming they act out of love.

Creating a body sculpture is a way of externalizing a feeling, a relationship, a value. A body sculpture becomes a visual representation of what is generally invisible or unnoticed. This makes it available to investigation, analysis – it becomes a code (in the Freirean, 2005, sense) for creating meaning, together. When the body sculpture comes to life and begins to speak as performer-participants relate to each other, power dynamics are enacted that explain why and how domination is exercised. For example, the

individual man comes to be understood not so much as a singular being but a representative of men – a symbol of the power bestowed on men through patriarchy. Confronting domination therefore, requires more than simply altering the relations between a man and a woman – change needs to go further in a society that is deeply hierarchical and patriarchal. The women reached this conclusion through experimentation, searching, questioning, proposing.

The spectator-participants in the group or in a performance can become creators of altered images and relations: they can transform the sculpture into one that has a totally different message. This process of creating a new expression of an attitude, a relationship, engages spectators as agents (what Boal called spec-actors) as they produce meaning and then transform meaning through physically manipulating the “clay” bodies into a different arrangement. The emerging subject is created in and through the process of shaping, it does not pre-exist the procedure. All participants are active co-producers releasing their own creativity and imagination. The educator / facilitator in this process guides and directs by making suggestions – or simply observes and gives feed-back, at the end. In an action-learning-cycle there comes a point when new information must be found to deepen the exploration, when it can re-ignite the thinking and analysis. The educator/facilitator functions as a resource person, asking questions, drawing attention to aspects of the image or sequence, offering new perspectives from the position of oversight due to the greater distance to the process. There may be the temptation to intervene, to direct, but vanguardism is not welcome in a group that works collectively, self-directing and dialoguing.

Workshops were illustrations of how ‘Race, gender, income, sexuality, physical ability, immigration status, language - intersect and overlap within an individual’s life experience, and also within structures of power’. (Klein, 2017, p. 99-100) They were also examples of conscientisation: the process through which participants developed a critical understanding of their being-in-the-world and in relation to each other and others. In dialogue the women articulated how the material conditions in Delft and beyond have to change alongside the interpersonal relations in the home. However, feeling powerless to address the material, social, economic shifts and transformations needed they focused on what they *could* change: relations of caretaking and reciprocity in the home and amongst friends and family, recognising the interdependence and potential joy that comes from mutual respect. These changes were shown in the play; interestingly, these changes also took place within the participants’ own lives. Now, two years after the fictional reality and the everyday came together, the new power dynamics and relations first rehearsed in workshops, are still in place.

Transformative learning or conscientisation?

Crowther and Lucio-Villegas (2012, p. 66) remind us that at community level the ability of adult education to transform global capitalism is doubtful. However, it can

begin to turn people into critical and active agents who are less easily managed or manipulated and it provides an opportunity to make visible alternative values and visions which animate people. It also develops networks and relationships based on shared interests rather than commodified relations.

Clover (2012, p. 65) shows how creativity and imagination in quilt-making have turned artworks into permanent visual stories and counter-narratives of struggle and despair, power and hope. The women who co-created and performed *Maria and Marius* and drew

pictures that speak about their lives, drawing attention to the socio-economic pressures that produce violence and abuse, refused to accept the conditions that reduce them to objects, in many different ways. By collectively producing knowledge that contradicts lived experience, by telling other stories than those that have become normalised, familiar, they protested and refused. All of these processes are clearly educational and O'Sullivan, Morrell and O'Connor (2012, p. 164) would define this process 'transformative learning':

Transformative learning involves experiencing a deep, structural shift in the basic premises of thought, feelings, and actions. It is a shift of consciousness that dramatically and irreversibly alters our way of being in the world. Such a shift involves our understanding of ourselves and our self-locations; our relationships with other humans and with the natural world; our understanding of relations of power in interlocking structures of class, race and gender; our body awareness, our visions of alternative approaches to living; and our sense of possibilities for social justice and peace and personal joy.

The Delft theatre workshops as much as the art session went through a process of transformative learning as the women examined the assumptions on which they had previously based their interpretations of negative experiences. As they discovered contradictions and tensions between the sense they had made of experiences of abuse and violence, and the commonality of their experiences, they shifted from blaming themselves for failed relationships towards naming domestic violence and abuse as symptomatic of the larger systems of oppression. In other words, recognising their assumptions as false they corrected their view of abuse as a social ill. They began to point fingers at the structural forces they identified as to blame – or in Newman's terms: they defined the enemy. (Newman, 1994) They tested their theory by exploring how men, too, suffer under the system of patriarchy, and analysed the relations between patriarchy, capitalism, poverty and social disintegration. This, I would contend, signalled a process of critical consciousness: in the play they exposed social and political contradictions, and then set out to suggest alternative ways of relating that might prefigure a shift in larger social structures.

It seems to me that while the theory of transformative learning speaks primarily about the self and explores personal consciousness that may lead to altered individual action as a result of visions of alternative approaches to living, it rarely addresses systemic change: altering the material base that is held in place by particular relations of power and interest. Radical education and conscientisation aim to go further.

Newman (2014) has usefully differentiated between conscientisation (*à la* Freire, 2005) and transformative learning. He suggested that conscientisation has affinities with transformative learning, and that it is aimed at the poor and the dispossessed. In other words, transformative learning is part of popular education. However, he is critical of transformative learning because transformative learning, as it is described in the literature, has a confessional element that is absent from conscientisation. The learner is encouraged to go in search of her or his false assumptions. S/he may emerge with new insights on the basis of which s/he corrects those assumptions and emerges with a new worldview, which, in turn, may lead to changing her/his behaviour. However, Newman (2014, p. 5) asserts, 'conscientisation is about mobilising learners to struggle against oppressive forces, and it encourages them to examine the ways those forces have worked upon them. The learners are not to blame. The oppressors are'. This clearly echoes Freire (2005): he called conscientisation the ability to intervene in reality in order to change it. Similarly, Boal (1995, p. 245) demanded that the Theatre of the Oppressed should be the

initiator of changes the culmination of which is not the aesthetic phenomenon but real life.

From conscientisation to action

For education that creates the conditions for aesthetic experiences to be truly radical, then, it must go beyond individual transformation and include action that does not target individual oppressors but rather the structures and relations of power and systems that keep oppressions in place. You cannot change relations by simply telling stories about them and making people aware of them. It requires larger, collective action. Dismantling old and building new structures is either attempted through revolutions, or a painstaking, slow process that requires revolutionary patience – the ability to struggle on.

Theatre – like art – can be an effective means for educating for change. However, for this to happen, certain preconditions that prefigure the desired reality must be met. For a start, we need to consciously re-politicise art and education, foreground power and relations.

A first essential step is to create and enact horizontal rather than vertical relationships. Facilitator/educators are co-participants in subject to subject relations that counter the competitive individualist hierarchical structure of most education. Resisting ‘the dominant ethos of separation and acting on the basis of radical interdependence instead’ (Escobar, 2018), creative theatre or art-based workshops are structured along radically democratic lines, where each participant has an equal voice in decision-making while being called to account, and is responsible for the whole while making way for others. The collective process must attempt to express the will of the group – rather than the voice of one. Throughout the Delft project, participants controlled the content and the form of the production, determined the representation of themselves and their stories. This is consistent with the principles of both popular education and theatre, which demands a democratic process that models respect, equality, and inclusion and implements good listening, conflict resolution, and consensual decision making. It is also the basis for what Freire (2005) called dialogue. When the process of experiencing and then practicing radical direct democracy is then taken into everyday life, workshops have functioned as a rehearsal for the every-day.

Secondly, particularly in the context of violent disruptions, the process of workshops necessitates the creation of a playful space. Butterwick and Selman (2003, p. 20) have outlined how in effective popular theatre processes, a space is created where groups and individuals can afford to work on dangerous issues. They suggest this space is similar to what Bhabha called a third space – a space of possibilities, of playful reality, of imagination, analysis, creation and enactment that allows new stories, characters to emerge. Boal (1995, p. 20) called this an aesthetic space, claiming it possesses gnoseological (i.e. Knowledge-enhancing) properties, that is, properties which stimulate knowledge and discovery, cognition and recognition. In the ninety-sixties and seventies in South Africa, Fugard and his players, Workshop 71, and Junction Ave Theatre Company all experimented with learning from and with each other in the processes of collective workshops of play-making.

Third, both play-making and picture-painting can initiate unexpected moments of making tensions and contradictions visible and showing up connections. Improvisations invite participants to try out new perspectives and angles and new vistas and unforeseen interpretations emerge. The process is dynamic as the messages evolve rather than being transmitted, declared. Often, participants express surprise at the associations they are

beginning to see: links between their personal troubles and those of others within particular dynamics of context; connections between the power and interest of those in positions of leadership and authority, and their own. Further, ordering scenes or marks on a page can be empowering in the sense that the collective creates a coherent narrative that makes some sense of what is otherwise messy and conflictual. Participants are the agents of sense-making and change-producing as they dissect bits into cognate sequences, images into larger pictures that tell a story. What was too large, too confusing, too overwhelming before is becoming ordered – people can observe themselves creating new orders, new connections, new sense through their actions.

Fourth, collective efforts and journeys happen in social movements. They emerge from the labour of rigorous mobilising and organising. Beyond critical analytical consciousness, collective action requires organisational skills. We must remember to nourish our collective processes, even as we fight to address our own personal needs and the pains of our loved ones. (Sangtin, Kisan, Mazdoor & Sangathan 2018, p. 9). Social movements build relations of solidarity knowing that

it is only through these thick collective efforts and journeys that we can find the insights and courage to identify the next turns and halts in our ever-unfolding journey. It is only these collective energies that can give us the strength to fulfil the responsibility of turning our desire for justice into a hunger for justice. (Sangtin Kisan Mazdoor Sangathan 2018, cited in Nagar, 2018, p 17-18)

Aesthetic processes working on various levels of consciousness beyond the rational are a powerful way of organising and mobilising collective struggles. As the Romero Theatre Troupe (Walsh, 2016, p. 128) experienced:

Through the art of storytelling and theatre, we have discovered solidarity. This kind of relationship with the audience represents the power of organic theatre and its potential as a tool for a revitalized labour movement for economic justice. Inspiring people to become involved in the labour movement today involves at some point making them feel as if they are part of a larger story. Theatre accomplishes this in a profound way.

In this process, popular education can play an important role as experiences in the eighties have shown us. When the worker cultural movement in Natal committed to making and performing plays, poetry, art, music they did so in order to strengthen the resistance movement. The Dunlop play, the Sarmcol Play were stories of strikes created to draw attention to the workers struggles, and mobilise support for their campaigns. Other plays, like Security, Mr Ishariot Mpimpi (von Kotze, 1988) educated about the need for working class solidarity both in the struggle of workers, and in the larger anti-apartheid struggle. All these plays emerged from strong trade unions, that is, organisations – and they were accountable to the membership of those movements / organisations, because the creative work was seen to be part of the struggle. Their aim was to draw attention to injustices and exploitation as conditions of working-class life.

Plays produced recently within social movement groupings and performed on picket lines or as part of protest actions described, analysed, drew attention to some detail of a campaign and struggle, similar to stories of strikes performed by workers in the eighties. Plays can ignite, they can light fires and illicit strong affective responses both in the makers/ performers and in the audience because the process appeals to the senses and emotions. Participants of a performance event engage with hands heart and head all at the same time: they act, they feel and they reason. For example, a recent play that informs about the ongoing history of struggles against evictions and so-called development and provides crucial data on the laws that protect people, is one strategy in the long struggle

for more systemic change. Like others this play had specific (educational) goals and targets particular issues; it arises out of strong organisation and is just one tool in the ongoing challenge to the status-quo. A play like this may live on because it becomes part of the history and lore of the housing struggle – and maybe it will also live on because of its creative aesthetic appeal that makes it memorable.

Conclusion

In 1969, writing about *Art and Revolution* John Berger (1969, p. 154) warned: ‘If we now chose to live in the world *as it is*, we must deny every purpose and every value which, as social beings, we have inherited.’ Importantly, he reminds us how our imagination, our hopes and beliefs in an alternative future, our visions have to be grounded in clear values. Working beyond words, artistic processes can generate images, sounds, feelings that express and clarify those values. But sometimes, the imagination needs to be fertilized (von Kotze, 2012, p.111), enriched with ideas and words, images and values that are allowed to break down slowly and mix into one, until they become the compost that feeds the imagination. This process is similar to the one of building solidarity: a slow, careful letting-go while listening mutually and forging-a-new collective vision. One more role for educators / facilitators is this, then: initiating improvisations, drawing questions from stories told, requesting images and illustrations of problematic issues, introducing objects, symbols as the starting point for experimentation – and feeding in examples of how others have worked around such problems, how others have generated ideas, towards making a mutually satisfying collectively owned vision.

If we wish to build that other future not simply as a denial or reversal of what *is* but embracing the interests of all people and the planet, we need to draw inspiration from various sources. Grassroots environmental activists and women who act wisely when taking care of the new generation by instilling respect and the insight that we need to complement each other, build solidarity, live in harmony with nature, are such sources, as are writers, artists, musicians who have the ability to transcend the mundane, explain and lay bare connections, or transport us into visionary dreaming. This process requires sustained energy and time fuelled by continuous critical dialogue, analysis and questioning. It cannot be a solitary process but it happens when people work together, in solidarity. Solidarity is a process requiring give-and-take in an ongoing negotiation of defining and nurturing common purpose. Popular education, inspired by art and theatre, writing and music so that critical analysis is forged with flights of the imagination can produce moments of openings when alternatives appear as real possibilities, and hope sustains the struggle.

Binaries of ‘either ... or’ are not helpful. In isiZulu the word for culture and cultivating is the same: ukulima: growing, nurturing something. Refusing to separate art from life, Brecht (1976, p. 309) suggested in a poem: Canalising a river / Grafting a fruit tree / Educating a person / Transforming a state / These are instances of fruitful criticism/ And at the same time instances of art.’ The educational component inherent in making and appreciating art is part of its value, part of making necessity beautiful especially when it appears a burden that drags people down. Athos in Michaels (1997) novel collected plants and made precise renderings of them with watercolours, before separating out the edible ones they used for supper. The important lesson was: look carefully; record what you see. Find a way to make beauty necessary.

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