The Migrant Crisis: One Theatre’s Quest to Assimilate Transient Individuals into Local Community through Innovative Techniques of Non-Verbal Communication

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Abstract

This paper aims to discuss Europe’s increasingly aggravated migrant crisis in relation to a theatre outreach group’s use of non-verbal communication techniques in its attempts to integrate such individuals into the local community. Emphasis is placed upon the department’s use of cultural animation; a process by which mixed groups of individuals can work together in non-hierarchical environments to explore issues and problem solve in creative ways. The paper further explores the notions of ‘catharsis’ and ‘challenging and re-evaluating previously held conceptions’ as outcomes of the cultural animation process, suggesting positive connotations for marginalized individuals entering the community as well as for members of the receiving community. Underpinned by the interpretive paradigm, the qualitative evidence presented during this paper was collected via semi-structured interviews and participant observation processes during the author’s PhD data collection. As such, the paper holds that the socially developed realities internalized by both marginalized individuals and local community members are created due to their experiences, while also maintaining that our self-views and ideas of the world are shaped simultaneously. The paper discusses the outcomes of the cultural animation process within the theatre outreach department’s work for both marginalized individuals and community members, concluding that positive situational outcomes are possible and can therefore lead to an easier process of integration for those seeking to enter the community while also making the acceptance of such individuals an easier process for those community members currently in residence.

Key Words: Catharsis, Community, Cultural Animation, Theatre, Transient
1. Introduction

The UN (United Nations) suggests that ‘refugee and migrant arrivals in the EU surpassed one million in 2015’ (www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/03/21/the-eu-migrant-crisis-explained-in-90-seconds/), however asylum was only offered to only ‘292,540 refugees’ (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34131911) during that same year, all of whom must be assimilated into existing communities within the EU. While the transition from refugee to community member is certainly a challenge in itself for both transient individuals and those existing members of the community with whom new arrivals seek to cohabit, a changing social attitude to the assimilation of such individuals into EU communities is adding increasing levels of difficulty to an already complex process.

Germany for example ‘received the highest number of new asylum applications in 2015, with more than 476,000’ requests (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34131911), while Hungary amassed the second highest amount of applications totalling ‘177,130’ (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34131911), thereby culminating in a total of ‘1,321,560’ (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34131911) asylum refugee applications for the EU (also including Norway and Switzerland) in 2015.

A spokesman for one German city dealing with an influx of new arrivals suggests that while the area initially ‘had a big welcome culture, this has calmed down’, however he also suggested that ‘The majority of people still welcome new arrivals, but there are some who say they are creating a strain on a local economy with an 11% rate of unemployment.’ (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-36148418) thus pointing to the potentially disastrous consequences associated with an influx of new arrivals to any community. In addition, Philip Hammond, the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, described refugees and asylum seekers ‘as marauders who would soon hasten the collapse of European civilisation’ in stating his view that we are ‘facing the world’s biggest refugee crisis since the second world war’ (www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2015/aug/10/10-truths-about-europes-refugee-crisis). Adversely however, ‘EU spokeswoman, Tove Ernst, said: “The ultimate goal should be to return to a normal situation as soon as possible for all member states.”’ (www.express.co.uk/news/world/646828/EU-Denmark-open-borders-Brussels-migrant-crisis), thereby hinting at the need for community organizations to increase their efforts for a smooth transition between migrant and community member status.

As such with ‘More than a million migrants and refugees’ entering into Europe in 2015 (www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34131911) a growing tension has emerged between the affected countries attempting to assimilate transient individuals into their communities, thereby leading to a ‘division in the EU over how best to deal with resettling people’ (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-34131911). In light of this recent population
growth the issue of how best to ease relations between those seeking to enter the community and those already inhabiting the area is becoming ever more prominent.

Encompass, a theatre outreach department operating within a UK based community, is one such organization attempting to reduce the growing tensions of assimilating new inhabitants to existing communities. Encompass is based within a building housing a ‘Theatre-in-the-round’ or ‘arena’ theatre which is a theatre space in which the audience surrounds the acting area’ with the theatre opening ‘in 1986 as Europe’s first purpose-built theatre-in-the-round’ (www.anon.org.uk). The architectural design of the theatre therefore creates democratic connotations to each performance within the space due to its inclusive nature, or as the theatre suggests, its ‘democratic ideology … radiates through all our work ensuring that the local communities have a sense of ownership and engage with the theatre at every level.’ (www.anon.org.uk).

As an outreach department Encompass aims to use ‘theatre to help people find new and positive ways to understand themselves, their communities and their responsibilities. It challenges destructive and anti-social behaviour, builds self-awareness and self-worth and develops positive attitudes’ (www.anon.org.uk). The department ‘works regionally, nationally and internationally’ through providing workshops, conferences, and events, ‘and is acknowledged as a national model for the ways theatre can be used to work within the community.’ (www.anon.org.uk). In particular Encompass aims to work ‘with individuals, groups and communities facing challenges – social and economic disadvantage, young people at risk of offending, adults with learning difficulties, and others at risk of being marginalised.’ (www.anon.org.uk), often in partnership with other professional individuals and organizations who may shed further insight into the issues being explored by the department.

One theatrical technique used by Encompass in its attempts to provide a nexus by which individuals from marginalized groups can become integrated with the existing community is cultural animation. Cultural animation is a theatrical technique which endeavours to remove individuals from their typical environments and to inspire them with the potential for individual and collective change through creative methods of problem solving. As such individuals are encouraged to explore issues in unusual ways, for example through creative methods of thinking and visualizing problems with the possibility of using aesthetic and symbolic props to aid visualization. Cultural animation further facilitates an environment devoid of social and professional status, partly achieved by breaking down status barriers. For example, during the process of cultural animation, a teacher and a student would both be given the same opportunities to share their views and neither would be valued more highly than the other. Cultural animation therefore promotes learning about current issues within the community but also invites individuals to embark on a journey of self-discovery during the
problem solving process through the creative and reflective techniques employed during sessions. In doing so, emphasis is placed on theatre techniques that are transferable for use into everyday life, rather than focusing on their use in organizational settings as management tools for problem solving.

As such, this paper seeks to explore the impacts of the work of Encompass with the marginalized groups of asylum seekers and refugees, while also shedding light on the outcomes of the department’s processes of engagement such as cultural animation can result in a sense of catharsis while encouraging participants to re-evaluate their previously held conceptions, a notion which provides a potential solution to the challenge of assimilating transient individuals into existing communities.

2. Literature Review

Many academic articles support the notion that organizations commonly use theatrical communication techniques to incite change; for examples see Westwood (2004) or Stager Jaques (2013). However, there is currently a lack of academic literature about how a theatre can itself use these same techniques to provoke change, thus illustrating a gap in the current knowledge yet to be explored. As such this literature review focuses on the topics of communication, cultural animation, challenging and re-evaluating previously held conceptions, and catharsis, in an attempt to showcase the current literature around the topic of assimilating marginalized groups into existing communities through the use of innovative non-verbal theatrical techniques.

3. Communication

Meisiek tells us that previous research has focused on the ‘language of the theatre as an analytical instrument’ (Meisiek, 2004:798), however Encompass’s work is better aligned with Baxter’s emphasis on the ‘importance of the relationship between what theatre says and how it says it’ (2013:257). While ‘The language, techniques, and metaphors of theatre have inspired a growing body of organizational research’ (Meisiek, 2004:798) the academic literature pertaining to the communicative practices between theatre practitioners and local community is little explored. Durden (2013:278) offers a similar perspective to that of Baxter (2013), stating that within theatre ‘there is a tendency to see the message as more important than the medium. Theatre has become a convenient way to present health-related and other social messages’ which while aligned with Encompass’s practices in relation to disseminating messages to the local community and further afield, presents an opposing perspective to that of the work of Encompass in which emphasis is placed on the potential benefits to be gained through the use of alternative mediums, rather than primarily on the message.

Durden however reminds us that ‘it has become commonplace for practitioners to use local cultural forms as vehicles for new messages. The use of traditional cultural forms of
performance allows audiences and participants to identify and represent their own identities in terms of world-views and values, knowledge, traditions, customs, beliefs, and symbols. Many would suggest that creating these familiar moments in theatre would have the effect of stimulating and moving the audience’ (2013:280). As such, Encompass’s work with the local community stretches beyond the physical boundaries of the theatre in an effort to grant further agency to the input and diverse backgrounds of both community members and those with the intend of becoming inhabitants.

Burvill furthers the debate surrounding inclusive methods of communication, shedding light on the perspective of marginalized participants such as asylum seekers and refugees who may not be fluent in English; ‘Using community languages when playing to English speakers reminds us of the migration experience of linguistic bafflement, puts us in that powerless position, if only for a moment or two’ (1986:84). As such Burvill illuminates the importance of inclusive methods of communication in providing an environment for dialogue in which all participants are mindful of the differences between group members, thus pointing us towards non-verbal methods of communication such as cultural animation in which verbal dialogue plays a less significant role. In addition, Bauman and Briggs note that ‘Such truly dialogical research does not view speakers as dupes who lack the ability to reflect meaningfully on their own communicative conduct. Rather, it accepts them as partners who have substantive contributions to make to the process of deconstructing Western views of language and social life and exploring a broader range of alternatives’ (1990:66), once again illuminating the significance of inclusive communication methods in enfolding multiple perspectives into the dialogue.

In addition Nakamura suggests that ‘communication is not the activity of conforming to the other and thus losing individuality, but rather the activity of expanding and deepening one’s own horizon through reconstructing the internal elements of one’s own viewpoint in such a way that emotional ties with the other are developed’ (2009:439), pointing to the mutually beneficial relationship that can arise from such discussions between theatre practitioners and community members, alongside those between the existing community and those seeking to join it. Furthermore as Mattern explains, ‘Dewey believed that art is a potent form of communication through which community is developed and political action undertaken’ (1999:54), thus illuminating additional benefits of such dialogue for the community. Mattern furthers his point in noting that ‘The crux of Dewey’s argument was that art, if closely tied to people’s everyday lives, is a form of communication through which people learn about each other’s similarities and differences, break through some of the barriers to understanding and awareness, and develop some of the commonalities that define
community’ (1999:54-55), thus further showcasing the impact of art as a medium for communication between practitioners and the community.

Finally on the topic of communication the academic literature turns to the concept of increased dissemination through communicative practices. Scharinger notes that the theatre is ‘a fairly inexpensive way to educate people and communicate messages in the face of a lack of infrastructure’ (2013:110), perhaps partially explaining the growing trend for educators and organizations to enlist theatre practitioners in disseminating their messages as explained by Nissley et al., as ‘performances in academia, where management professionals are seeking to improve their teaching and theatrical skills’ (2004:818), or by Sutherland in his statement that ‘Management and learning educators and practitioners are increasingly disenchanted with traditional (rational, instrumental, economically dominated, realist orientated and ‘objectively’ analytical) means of development and practice’ (2012:25). As such, Mattern posits that ‘The messages of art are thus at least partially publically accessible. They are not merely tied to a subjective and private world of the artist. It is the public, common quality of art that gives art its communicative capacity’ (1999:57), illuminating the potential of theatre to reach a wide audience, rather than the typically restrictive dissemination practices of academics and organizations.

This leads us to the notion that ‘Performance … provides a frame that invites critical reflection on communicative processes’ (Bauman and Briggs, 1990:60) in that ‘the work of art exists as a language for the expression of the other’ (Nakamura, 2009:433). As Encompass’s work includes much focus on the discussion of difficult issues within the community such as the introduction of marginalized groups entering the community, the ability of art to generate multiple perspectives can lead to a much increased and engaged audience, as Mattern explains, ‘If people disagree over the meaning of a work of art, then it can be appropriated for different, sometimes contradictory, uses within and between communities’ (1999:60). Staller (2013:551) further comments on the capacity of art to bring together individuals from diverse background in her study of an academic congress, as she suggests that ‘new friendships were forged at these meetings and have been nurtured and reinvigorated over the years’, a notion much applicable to the work of Encompass with the local community and the marginalized individuals seeking to enter the community.

4. Cultural Animation

While cultural animation as a relatively new concept is a central aspect with in Encompass’s work it remains little explored within the academic literature. Marrengula explains that cultural ‘animation should help individuals as people to develop their potential and creativity’ (2010:74) in addition to providing an environment in which all participants may be viewed as equals due to the removal of social and professional hierarchies.
Continuing in a similar vein Smart posits, ‘It doesn’t really matter that one of them is an owner of a business and another one works on an assembly line or is a student or is a dentist or whatever they are; they come together to do a show and become friends.’ (2014:1).

Watson explains that ‘Whist all knowledge is inherently political in its generation and construction, power, as such, does not reside within that knowledge. The issue is one of realizing the potential which is in the knowledge, not the content of that knowledge as such’ (2001:387), thereby pointing to the nature of cultural animation in which emphasis is placed upon the sharing and potential dissemination of knowledge, rather than being placed upon the social or professional standing of the individual sharing the information. As such, Marrengula comments on the political underpinnings present within cultural animation techniques, stating that ‘it is very difficult to influence the participation of individuals without seeing how the political and structural elements influence people’s behaviour at a local level’ (2010:82), however further adding to the academic literature on cultural animation in suggesting that ‘Animation is …, a pedagogy that allows individuals to be aware of their freedom’ (2010:74), thus showcasing the potential of cultural animation techniques to bypass the political and hierarchical notions of participants.

Saldana suggests that ‘There’s a folk saying among theatre practitioner: “A play is life – with all the boring parts taken out”.’ (2003:221) while Snyder-Young states that ‘We can tell stories as a way of knowing the world, we can analyse our own stories as a way of knowing ourselves, and we can analyse the stories of others as a way of getting to know the world through them’ (2011:950). When considered in conjunction the works of Saldana (2003) and Snyder-Young (2011) speak to the ability of cultural animation to turn the everyday into something spectacular whether of a positive or negative nature. As such one example stemming from Encompass’s use of cultural animation within its activities is the department’s ability to imbue ordinary items of daily use with meaning, thus conforming to Zietsma and Lawrence’s (2010:190) notion that ‘practice work refers to actors’ efforts to affect the recognition and acceptance of sets of routines, rather than their simply engaging in those routines’ (2010:190). As such Zietsma and Lawrence are suggesting that practices such as cultural animation can be seen within boundary work which ‘represents the attempts of actors to create, shape, and disrupt boundaries’ (2010:190) in that ‘boundaries not only define membership but can crucially shape the practices of the community’ (Zietsma and Lawrence, 2010:193).

5. Challenging and Re-Evaluating Previously Held Conceptions

One outcome of the cultural animation process evident within Encompass’s efforts to ease the transition of migrant to community member status is how the department seeks to encourage participants to challenge and re-evaluate their previously held conceptions, as Beck
at al., tell us of Shakespeare’s ‘own beliefs about the purpose of theatre – that its purpose is to reflect our lives back to us in order that we may see ourselves more clearly’ (Beck et al., 2011:688). In a similar vein Brydon gives an examples from her own feelings about a research project stating that ‘cross-cultural sensitivity urged me to be sympathetic towards, and sensitive to, other culture viewpoints or ways of knowing’ (2012:156) thus implying that the process of re-evaluation is not limited to participants with stigmatized backgrounds, but is also inclusive of to those individuals whom we would perceive as holding a high social or professional status. Brydon continues to assert her viewpoint that both practitioners and professionals should ‘consider the impact of their own values and cultural tradition on their behaviour while simultaneously undertaking a similar analysis with respect to their client(s)’ (2012:164), thus promoting the notion that internal change is a considered and varied notion, much dependent upon the individual’s background and previously held conceptions of ‘values and culture’ (Brydon, 2012:164). Meisiek and Barry also add to the literature pertaining to the potential of theatre to challenge previously held conceptions, commenting on the reflexive nature of work undertaken by theatres and outreach groups such as Encompass; ‘active-audience organizational theatre might have indirect and delayed effects’ (Meisiek and Barry, 2007:1819). While Meisiek and Barry lend focus to organizational theatre the concept they suggest can be seen as generalizable by which any individual may engage in reflexive practice following a theatrical performance, potentially causing the ‘indirect and delayed effects’ of change suggested by the authors.

Further to Encompass’s notions of attempting to illuminate the potential to change previously held conceptions through their work is the department’s more individualistic ambition of inviting participants to re-evaluate themselves, potentially leading to internal change. As Fenge et al., explain, ‘Individuals situate themselves within their social context according to their socially acquired system of perceptions and pre-disposition and habitus’ (2012:553), which for Encompass can present challenges in aiding individuals to consider themselves outside of their typical self-view. Boal further comments on the attempts of theatre to present an opportunity to participants for a re-evaluation of the self, placing focus on the aesthetic properties that can aid an individual’s re-evaluation of the self, suggesting that ‘The theatre influences the spectators not only with respect to clothing but also in the spiritual values that can be insulated in them through example’ (2000:77). Paskow however, lends focus to the psychological process undergone by individuals in attempts to re-evaluate the self; ‘Two other facts enable the spectator to identify with actions and traits that he would not ordinarily confront. In the first place, the spectator knows that what he is viewing is a type of illusion and therefore the permission given to him to objectify some of his own dark feelings and inclinations is not more painful to him than the indulgence of fantasy, and
perhaps even less so, since the spectator can, if necessary, blame the upsurge of acceptable desires or affects on the playwright’s manipulative effort. Ultimately most of us do wish to know, however painful the outcome, why we ourselves make the kinds of wrong choices that we make. The protagonist’s actions initiate the spectator’s exploration.’ (1983:65). Paskow’s (1983:65) notion therefore suggests that while outreach departments such as Encompass may desire the initiation of processes of re-evaluate of the self from their participants, the individuals themselves must be willing to engage with such a journey. In doing so Paskow (1983:65) posits that individuals are likely to confront may undesirable self-traits, however he also suggests that theatre provides an ideal opportunity for such a process as much of the negativity, if overwhelming to the individual, can be blamed upon ‘the playwright’s manipulative effort’ (1983:65), thus allowing the individual to engage with self re-evaluation processes in a less painful manner. Scharinger (2013:107) lends further focus to the discussion of self re-evaluation processes in her consideration of ‘victims of violence’; she suggests that ‘the process of engagement and creation of such a performance is just as important [as the outcome]. For example, in working with victims of violence such a process can provide a safe space to explore and express their experiences and current situation, while also having positive effects on trauma-recovery such as identity-rebuilding, disruption of process of isolation, reconnection of the physical, intellectual, and emotional self, or encouragement and empowerment to engagement in social activism’ (Scharinger, 2013:107), therefore suggesting theatre as a space in which self re-evaluation may become possible for any individual regardless of their background.

6. Catharsis

A further potential outcome of the cultural animation process employed by Encompass in its efforts to connect the existing community and those who seeks to join it is catharsis. The current literature on catharsis offers various definitions of the term with Paskow (1983:59) stating that during catharsis ‘We undergo a purgation or purification of emotional states’, while Hanes (2000:70) suggests the intent of catharsis is ‘to discharge or release pent-up emotions.’ The literature acknowledges the wide ranging spectrum of individuals and organizations that can be affected by catharsis in its differing forms; for example John’s study of catharsis in IsiZulu prison theatre (2013) in which the prisons inmates discuss how they have achieved cathartic release through interaction with theatre whilst incarcerated, or Westwood’s notion of catharsis in an organizational setting that takes place through comedy (2004). Thomas (2009:626) suggests ‘catharsis aims as a type of appeal to the individual to change his or her life’, thus agreeing with the academic literatures overarching view that individuals can be made to feel better through the release of negative emotions, or as Paskow explains, ‘The spectator, because he is relieved of excess bile and no longer suffers emotional
pressures, experiences pleasure’ (1983:60). On the other hand, Hanes further adds to the discussion in noting that ‘catharsis can involve a massive discharge of feelings which the client finds overwhelming. Such an event may lead to “re-doubling” of defence, so they recommend directing the cathartic process so the pent-up affect is released, yet the client is not overwhelmed and threatened. Instead of a sudden release of all repressed feelings, gradual release can give the patient time to understand and integrate intense feelings’ (2000:72).

As the academic literature on the topic of catharsis tends to centre on the individual rather than the collective, it also tends to focus on studies conducted within an organizational setting rather than a community setting (see Westwood (2004) for an example). Continuing in a similar vein, the literature often focuses on catharsis as something to be achieved whilst watching a drama, rather than through personal involvement and participation. Meisiek (2004:799) for example, states that ‘one process that can develop during the drama is associated with the idea that theatre represents a duplication of reality’. This hints at the notion that individuals viewing drama can use that time and space to explore their own emotions that may arise during a performance, thus illustrating a gap in the academic literature as the events that happen to individuals may differ dramatically from those being performed on stage. As such, it seems necessary to explore the effects of catharsis when viewed in the light of an individual’s or community’s problems, rather than those being prescribed by the actors on stage, to which Encompass employs the former approach. Andreasen’s work appears particularly relevant to the notion of the practical implications of cathartic release as a result of the work of theatre, as he notes that community plays ‘may serve a role in a kind of collective ‘healing” by giving new viewpoints on development and by bringing unspoken taboos to a conscious level in order to point out future directions for living. Community plays can also challenge spectators by confronting unexpected aspects of a culture, which had been either deliberately or unconsciously hidden.’ (1996:73).

Vera and Crossan (2004:728) state that ‘The theatre metaphor is transparent and accessible because the elements upon which actors improvise are the same ones available to individuals in their day-to-day lives’, much in-line with Encompass’s attempts to address problems occurring within the daily lives of community members within its work. Entwined with the department’s focus on the transference of daily life issues of individuals into theatrical performance is Thomas’s (2009:261) suggestion that ‘the concept of catharsis came to signify generally the practice of self-regulation that aims to consolidate and stabilise the interiority of the modern subject against the disturbing effects of the impure external world’, thus validating Encompass’s efforts to enable participants to attain catharsis in helping them to deal with life in contemporary society and as such, encouraging positive life decisions. John (2013:94) reports from his study with inmates involved in IsiZulu Prison Theatre that
“education takes place – not as a rational experience, but as an emotional, sentient involvement.”’, which when considered in conjunction with Durden’s (2013:280) notion that ‘the art and theatre that we make must be expressive to deal with feelings and emotions that can move an audience to change behaviour’, provides justification for Encompass’s actions through its desire to illuminate the alternate paths available to participants through cathartic release achieved during the department’s events. Mattern also contributes to the academic literature surrounding catharsis through his suggestion that ‘A work of art expresses to people their common experiences and shared histories and, perhaps, common concerns.’ (1999:62). While Mattern’s notion primarily resonates with Meisek’s (2004:799) suggestion of theatre as representing ‘a duplication of reality’ through a shared experience during which individuals may employ projective technique (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009) in using the object of art as a cathartic medium through which they can portray their thoughts and feelings, it also hints at the shared experience made possible to individuals of varied backgrounds through their engagement with the art work, hence promoting a heightened understanding of the multiple and diverse perspectives potentially contained within the group thus leading to better informed and more positive life choices through the cathartic activity of engaging at a deep level with others about the same piece of art.

Furthermore, Encompass can be seen as promoting confidence through the attainment of catharsis. As such, Cox (2012:123) turns to notions of victimhood stemming from a theatrical perspective; ‘The complex transactional (artist-audience) implications of these critical perspectives on victimhood and representation are apparent when we take into account the fact that refugee narratives often serve one or the other … of two broad functions: representing marginalized communities within or for themselves (typically pursuing recuperative and/or therapeutic ends) and to or for broadly constituted host communities (typically pursuing cross-cultural pedagogic empathic ends).’ As a significant proportion of Encompass’s activities are designed to integrate marginalized groups such as asylum seekers and refugees into the local community, Cox’s suggestion of the necessity of a positive cathartic relationship between both the transient individuals entering the community and those already in residence becomes apparent.

7. Methodology

The study is of a qualitative nature and as such is underpinned by the interpretive paradigm therefore recognizing that socially developed realities are created due to the experiences of individuals. In addition, the study accepts that self-views and ideas of the world are created simultaneously while also agreeing that ‘humans are interpretive beings who interact with the world through a culturally transmitted background that configures and makes sense of it’ (Linden and Cermak, 2007:45), therefore rejecting ‘a reality which is
independent of the minds of men’ (Burrell and Morgan, 2011:260). As this study intends to ‘generate understanding through knowledge creation’ (Bell and Thorpe, 2013:11). An interpretive approach was chosen for the research project due to the necessity of participant’s realities being seen as multiple and conflicting in providing differing perspectives of similar events due their multiple and diverse backgrounds.

The data presented within this paper was attained in 2015 during the author’s data collection process during PhD research. Data triangulation was employed in the form of twenty three semi-structured interviews, participant observation during multiple Encompass events in addition to document analysis.

While ‘A significant challenge faced by qualitative researchers concerns the wide choice of techniques’ available for data collection (Bell and Willmott, 2015:31), semi-structured interviews were selected as a data collection method as the author’s aim was ‘to understand and convey the everyday lifeworlds, comprising webs of meaning, which people inhabit’ (Bell and Willmott, 2015:28). The study also agrees with Oldfather and West’s (1994:24) notion that ‘qualitative researchers learn to “read their participants – discovering which questions or issues are important to the insiders of the culture they are hoping to understand, and collaborating to shape the directions of the inquiry accordingly”, thus providing the author with the potential to expand on any relevant points presented by participants during their interviews in that ‘The interview is a way of writing the world’ (Denzin, 2001:25) for both the interviewer and the interviewee.

Participant observations were also employed as a data collection method as the author attempted to develop ‘an insider perspective, trying to see the world through the eyes of those studied, and seeking to understand how those participating in social worlds understand themselves and the things and practices which are meaningful to them’ (Bell and Willmott, 2015:28). This allowed for a ‘common ground’ (Abell et al., 2006:227) to be constructed between the participants and the author, in which the author’s attempts at ‘trying to build rapport … through shared local and cultural knowledge’ (Abell et al., 2006:232) became justified as social science researchers ‘must intentionally put themselves in a position to make discoveries, rather than carrying out their daily research agenda by passively awaiting the moment when they are struck, as it were, with serendipity’ (Stebbins, 2001:6).

Individuals were selected for invitation to interview through identification by Encompass theatre practitioners, the author’s academic supervisor who had been involved in partnership projects with the theatre, and the author herself who had been a participant in several Encompass events. Participants were invited via email to take part in the project and interviews took place at a time and place of the participant’s choice either in person, by telephone call, or via Skype. The interview participants were comprised of three academics,
seven professionals, seven volunteers, and six theatre practitioners, all of whom were in some way connected to projects associated with Encompass’s work. All participants were given pseudo names to provide anonymity (see table one).

Participant interviews were recorded on the author’s Dictaphone after gaining consent, to which none of the interviewees objected. Participant observations were also recorded by the author through note taking in the addition to photographs being taken by the author during several of Encompass’s sessions with participants.

As Langley (1999:694) suggests, a significant challenge was faced by the author in ‘moving from a shapeless data spaghetti towards some kind of theoretical understanding that does not betray the richness, dynamism, and complexity of the data but that is understandable and potentially useful to others’, as such necessitating a rigorous thematic analysis of the data collected in efforts to identify key trends within the data. The data was firstly ordered by the professional status of participants (academics and professionals, volunteers, theatre practitioners), and further analysed by each question asked by the researcher being further explore to identify similarities, differences, and key trends within the participant’s answers.

While 23 participants agreed to be interviewed for the study, an initial 52 invites were sent to potential interviewees. As such, the lack of replies received from over half of the individuals invited to participate in the project may account for the overwhelmingly positive comments made by those individuals who did reply during the interview.

In considering notions of reflexivity there is a notable worry about being either overly or insufficiently engaged with participants (Geertz, 1989) to which the author was particularly concerned by the former. Due to the inclusive nature of Encompass’s events the author considers that as ‘reflexivity is an inalienable human capacity it must be acknowledged as on going’ (Holland, 1999:472), while also conceding to Bell and Willmott’s (2015:42) notion that ‘reflexivity not only involves questioning the taken-for-granted realities of others, but also turning the reflexive glance on ourselves to appreciate how the representation of the reality studied by the researcher is actively and inescapably constituted by us’ thereby reducing the temptation to imbue the data with notions of personal biases brought to, and created by, the process of research.

8. Results and Discussion

As a significant proportion of Encompass’s work is focused on building and developing community in the theatre’s local area, the department can as such be seen as committed to integrating marginalized groups into the community. As such, changing the internal composition of attitudes within the community, for example a dislike of asylum seekers or ex-offenders, towards a more favourable view of individuals from these marginalized groups is an important task in inciting change within community. Emily, a professional who frequently
works in conjunction with Encompass on topics involving young people, provides an account of Encompass’s work in trying to change the aforementioned negative perceptions of others within the community;

‘we get a lot of young people that maybe come with preconceived ideas that aren’t theirs, maybe from families, friends, media, … we do have a lot of young people saying oh you know, and you could almost hear the parents or grandparents speaking, they come over here, they take our jobs, they get our houses you know they get all this money etc., etc., and didn’t understand, so to actually sit down and hear the reality of it, and some people were in tears’.

In considering Encompass’s use of methods of inclusivity within their work, it remains apparent that integrating asylum seekers and refugees into the local community is a challenging and on-going task for the department. As Ellen notes, Encompass’s work in attempting to incorporate marginalized groups such as asylum seekers and refugees into the local community can help to

‘change people’s awareness of other people and other nationalities, and that’s a massive thing, that we do need, an awareness that maybe they talk different, and they come from a different country but they’re the same as us, they’re no different really, it’s just that they’ve had to move out of their country for particular reasons’.

Continuing in a similar vein, Harry also suggests that Encompass’s work has impacted his levels of inclusivity and acceptance towards marginalized groups,

‘we’ve had asylum seekers, we’ve had people with learning disabilities, … and they’re all working together and every one of them, is valued, now you have to take that out when you go back home again, the fact that you’ve had this experience of valuing other people you wouldn’t normally meet, that, you have to carry on with it, you can’t help it, because you know this guy who’s an asylum seekers not a monster who’s come here to steel my tax money, he’s a guy with a family and you’ve sat there and ate together and had a laugh together, he’s not the same person anymore and you’re not’.

In addition, Ellen suggests that Encompass’s work results in a mutually beneficial relationship for both the community and those attempting to become a part of that community, stating that members of marginalized groups are

‘Making more friends, when they go in there [the theatre] they’re not treated as somebody from another country, they’re treated as individuals and welcoming them’.

While through Encompass’s work both Ellen and Harry see marginalized groups as individuals to be included within the community, Cox (2012:125) posits an alternate viewpoint suggesting that ‘although children challenge the international community to think
differently about the issue of asylum – children around the world are no exempt to any significant degree from the asylum policies and procedures of host nations, much less from persecution and violence’. Finn however, suggests that Encompass is actively attempting to connect all members of marginalized groups with the existing community, suggesting that Encompass

‘empowers the community, gets people involved, gets young people who are not necessarily on the right paths and gives them a chance, … they don’t exclude anyone, everyone’s allowed to be involved and they have the opportunity for community, it doesn’t matter who you are, you can be involved; asylum seekers, just everyone, from all different backgrounds to get involved, they’re not biased at all, and I think that has a massive impact, everybody coming together from all different backgrounds with the same thing in common’.

In a similar vein Lexi comments on methods of inclusive communication, stressing Encompass’s understanding that one method of communication would not be appropriate in attempting to engage all potential participants,

‘we reduce those barriers [to participation] if it’s text messages, … we knew there was no way we’d get people to come to a workshop at the theatre, if you hadn’t had gone to where they are, first of all, and made connections with them, and done stuff together, … you can’t just send emails out to marginalised people or stick a notice on a bloody wall’.

Lexi’s story resonates with Cox’s (2012:125) notion that ‘if factual testimony must affix to official markers of identity, and indeed, if it must be spoken in a language that is not one’s own, then it can only offer an incomplete and inadequate account…’. While Cox’s work primarily explores marginalized groups such as refugees and asylum seekers, parallels can be drawn to Encompass’s work with many of the department’s participants. For many participants verbal language that is not of their mother tongue may create difficulties in expression of thoughts and feelings, however such difficulties may also manifest when individuals find themselves in unexpected and undesirable situations. As such, Encompass’s focus on inclusive communication through experience can be seen to allow participants in such situations to engage in activities thus providing an alternate outlet for their thoughts and feelings in which much of the stigma traditionally attached to the language associated with transient individuals can be seen as void.

‘The word ‘catharsis’ derives from the Greek substantive catharsis (purgation, cleansing, purification) and its verbal and adjective forms kathairein and katharos (pure, clean).’ (Thomas, 2009:259), a process through which ‘We undergo a purgation or purification of emotional states’ (Paskow, 1983:59). Encompass’s work with the local community embodies
a strong desire to produce cathartic effects upon those with whom it interacts and as such, may potentially initiate a process of change upon those individuals as a consequence of the emotional release brought to the fore due to their participation with the department’s work.

Burvill (1986:87) suggest that ‘plays are not naturalistically intense soap operas with progressive tendencies … The effect is intended to be on the self-esteem and self-awareness of those they write about.’ (Burvill, 1986:87), a notion evident in Lexi’s tale of two individuals who have dramatically changed their lives for the better due to participation in Encompass’s work,

‘seeing [Lisa] with her little girl and how well she’s doing instead of being in prison, another young woman who’s happily married and invited [Encompass practitioners] to her wedding, so you know, there are large kind of huge headline grabbing things, and equally really intimate, important equally delightful, wonderful things’.

This leads us to Durden’s (2013:288-289) suggestion that ‘if we want to move an audience to the point of behavioural change, then the best way to motivate them to change is by moving them emotionally; taking them on a cathartic journey through out applied-theatre performances.’, as evident in Adelaide’s recollection of the cathartic journey several individuals involved in Encompass’s work have undertaken,

‘So that young woman’s involvement who was up for sentencing is a really special thing, … and those forced marriage protection orders, … there’s a young man involved in the work of [Encompass], … I think he was having trouble communicating at school, he was feeling excluded and he was really, really painfully shy, and through working with [Encompass] he’s become this, courageous, bright, talkative, sociable young man, who’s gone off, we’ve sent him to different parts of the country, … one of the things that I see [Encompass] do time and time again, is take young people who have never been anywhere else but [the area] and send them to Poland, or Bristol, and just let them see what the rest of the world is like, my God, if you don’t know what’s out there how can you aspire to anything’.

While Adelaide’s account provides several indications of the attainment of catharsis, the story of the ‘painfully shy’ ‘young man’ in particular demonstrates the use of catharsis in inciting positive future action. Due to the young man’s interactions with Encompass’s work he has been moved emotionally (Durden, 2013) in such a way that his characteristics became altered to a significant extent, thus allowing him to pursue a positive future as opposed to one in which he feels ‘excluded’.

In addition, Lola provides an indication of her attainment of catharsis in the pursuit of positive life choices stating that she now enjoys
‘meeting people from different backgrounds, different countries, [and] I think you get to know a lot of people, and it is a highlight that you make friends here, and you feel safe here, it’s a safe environment so you know no harm will come to you’.

Lola’s suggestion of the theatre as ‘a safe environment’ implies that prior to engaging with Encompass’s work she may not have felt comfortable in ‘meeting people from different backgrounds, [and] different countries’, suggesting that Lola has undertaken a cathartic journey following which she has released any negative feelings towards community members with backgrounds differing to her own, thereby allowing her to be more open to meeting new people in the future. John (2013:94) explains that ‘The movement from conflict to resolution, identification with characters and situations, and catharsis, … promotes notions of correct social relations.’, as is evident in Lola’s case whereby she has moved from conflicting thoughts about those with backgrounds differing to her own to feeling ‘safe’ to make friends during such encounters, leading to a potential identification with others, and as such, cathartic release of negative feelings towards such individuals.

Newman (2012:58) suggests that ‘Once the audience members are moved from their comfortable theatre seats, they can become part of the space, shaping it with their movement, potentially engaging in a phenomenological experience of the performance which utilises all of their senses’. Newman’s thoughts of audience engagement can be seen as related to catharsis when considered in conjunction with Alyssa’s memory of an Encompass workshop in Japan in which she demonstrates the cathartic effects of the event on both herself and another participant,

‘one of the participants was profoundly deaf, … but there was no way that they [the translators] could go from English to Japanese in translation and then go to sign language, … we were building a tree out of brooms and anything that was in the building, and so [Encompass practitioners] got [participants] because of that artistic thing, got them to make the flowers out of paper tissue and so they were in full flight, absolutely loving it, because I guess it’s about contributing a skill and participating, and then the young woman was cold and I gave her my scarf and she wore it for the whole of the workshop and then come the end I just thought aw she looks so nice in it we’ll give it to her, … I can’t do sign language, but then we had this conversation where she insisted she gave me a piece of her art work in return, … [it was] about equality, there’s language, there’s technique working in different cultures with very little understanding of what’s going on and then, yeah just that emotional connection of always for me being able to look at that piece of art work in the window in the kitchen and you know think that stories lovely, … [Lexi] sort of asked people if there was an object amongst all the stuff that we’d taken, which like we said before are just
everyday objects, so something that for you represents health and a good community feeling, and she picked up a rose, a red rose, and said what she wanted for her feeling about being more belonging to the community was for the thorns not to stick, … so there’s someone without language being able to very clearly articulate what it felt like to be profoundly deaf’.

Alyssa’s example clearly shows that ‘passion helps to convey value’ (Simpson et al., 2013:10), as evident in her engagement with the young woman. The piece of art work given in return for the scarf serves to provide Alyssa with a sense of catharsis through Taylor and Ladkin’s notion of projective technique, in which ‘The output of artistic endeavours allows participants to reveal inner thoughts and feelings that may not be accessible through more conventional developmental modes’ (2009:56). In addition the young women in her choice of a ‘red rose’ and desire for ‘the thorns not to stick’ can be seen as employing Taylor and Ladkin’s notion of illustration of essence, as ‘Art offers a specific illustration that is meant to have each observer connect to it in their own particular way’ (2009:59), thus by which the young woman was able to portray her experiences to other members of the group, potentially inspiring catharsis for both herself through getting across her feelings, but also for the other members of the group who may achieve catharsis leading to positive future action due to an increased awareness of what it is like for people to be in a situation comparative to that of the young woman.

Encompass’s attempts to aid participants in the achievement of catharsis can often create a sense of triumph in individuals who may typically consider themselves to have ‘no agency, no control over their lives and decisions’ (Baxter, 2013:264). Meisiek (2004:800) suggests that catharsis in theatre can be seen ‘as signifying the power of theatre to change the minds and hearts if the audience.’ (Meisiek, 2004:800), thus imbuing Encompass’s work with the power to incite change through catharsis upon many aspects, including that of participant’s confidence levels. Hadley offers an example of such a process with her recollection of a previous Encompass project with which she was involved,

‘one of my personal highlights was the work I did with the [Go-dwell] group, … they were a charity, that offered support to families that were struggling, … and so I had this group of women, and actually they’d all come from quite, … difficult circumstances some had had domestic violence and others had just been sort of struggling in general, with their lives, and they needed to create a performance, all of them started off going, there’s no way we can do this, this is ridiculous, it’s not happening, and by the end of it they’d created a really beautiful performance for the [Go-dwell] 30th birthday, one of the women from the group went to college off the back of that, she said she’d gained the confidence enough to go to college and start
studying nursing, so that was really lovely, to know that, she’s felt empowered by the work that we’d been doing, to then, further her career, … I was really proud of them when they’d finished the performance’.

Hadley’s account of Encompass’s work with the Go-dwell group provides an excellent example of the attainment of catharsis through interaction with the department’s activities. While participants began the project from a very negative standpoint, ‘there’s no way we can do this, this is ridiculous, it’s not happening’, the result of the project was in fact successful, thus providing a sense of catharsis through the removal of the negative doubts of participants in favour of a positive attitude due to the success of the project. While by itself the Go-dwell group project can be seen as building confidence through catharsis, further evidence is presented in Hadley’s story through one of the participants enrolling in a college course following the completion of the group’s performance. As the participant has undergone the process of catharsis to such a significant extent that her self-doubts have receded in exchange for increased levels of confidence, she is now able to take positive action for the future.

Baxter (2013:259) further suggests that a traumatic background, such as with members of the Go-dwell group, can leave participants in ‘an uncomfortable comfort zone; familiar. In other words, they stay stuck, and fail to transcend or overcome their difficulties, clinging to their scripting of themselves in misery or unable to escape their own pathology. They remain trapped in recycling their stories, endlessly witnessing each other’s, and living defined by their own tragedy.’, thus illuminating the importance of Encompass’s efforts for cathartic release in its’ participants.

One significant aspect of any individual’s efforts for change can be seen through an alteration of their internal dialogue, or, in other words, in challenging or re-evaluating their own previously held conceptions. In working with Encompass, individuals are encouraged to re-evaluate the thoughts and feelings they hold in relation to seminal topics of discussion, which can result in additional clarity on issues or can ‘add to their ability to relate to other people’ (Lesavre, 2012:245). Through the exploration of participants’ stories, it becomes apparent that the changes cited include those on both a personal level, and those where Encompass have dispersed knowledge which has acted as a springboard for change in individuals and groups. In the following excerpt Harry discusses the impacts of his own internal re-evaluation of previously held conceptions on his voluntary work:

‘I have experienced changed opinions, … it’s also, validated some experiences, some opinions, because it’s made me rethink what I thought was a good thing, you may have had an opinion that you’d never have thought out loud, and the fact that you’ve been forced to challenge it and rethink it doesn’t necessarily change it, but it reinforces it, … personal confidence things, …, because I know I can, so that’s a
personal change, equally, I’m more involved with sections of the community that I
wouldn’t otherwise have been, so again, working with young people with learning
difficulties, I would never have done that, direct result of working with [Encompass]
theatre situations, … it’s something I look forward to, I want to do that, … you come
away feeling I want to do more, I want to do more, and that’s worthwhile, if those are
changes, yeah, bring it on’.

In considering his process of re-evaluation Harry points out that while some opinions
have been altered, others have been ‘reinforced’, therefore providing internal change.
Here, Boal’s notion that ‘theatre is the most perfect artistic form of coercion’ (2000:39)
becomes apparent as Harry is challenging previously held thoughts and feelings due to his
involvement with Encompass. For example, through the creation of an Encompass workshop
on a difficult topic, an assertion is being made that more information or a period of reflection
upon participants’ previously held convictions about the topic would be beneficial to the
community, as the views currently held by participants may not be desirable. While they are
not explicitly being coerced into changing their internal dialogues, evidence presented by
Encompass during their work has the power to be a persuasive force for change.
In addition, Scharinger suggests ‘participatory arts projects … [as] having desirable impacts
in people’s lives by forming relations to indigenous knowledge and cultural understanding’
(2013:103). Emily sees a reduction in the lack of education within the community on difficult
issues as one of the ‘desirable impacts’ (2013:103) that could arise from ‘forming relations to
indigenous knowledge and cultural understanding’ (2013:103);

‘for example with learning disabilities, you find young people are quite maybe, I
don’t want to say scared, wary, for speaking to someone with a learning disability or
mental health need, and again it’s because they don’t understand, they’ve not been
educated, or again, in the newspapers you get attacked by people with mental health
issues, you know its’ all been negatives, but suddenly to be in a room [during an
Encompass project] and, … you often get young people saying but they’re just like
us, I didn’t realise, they’re human, they’re like us, … everybody, we’re all equal just
people are different’. Emily then continues to suggest that Encompass ‘Develops you,
… I’ve met so many different people, you know, and again I didn’t really know a lot
around asylum seekers and things like that, … so being able to look at something new
and meet people that maybe you wouldn’t meet on a day to day basis, opens your
eyes’.

Here Emily is proposing that while a lack of education and general knowledge within the
community has the potential of leading to a very negative view of a particular topic or
marginalized group, she is also implying that Encompass’s work has the capacity to provide
enlightenment on these issues through using arts-based methods to inform the impressions of members of the community; as in her example of Encompass’s work on community perceptions of learning disabilities and mental health issues.

While Boal sees the coercive side of the theatre he also notes that theatre ‘is determined by society much more stringently than the other arts, because of its immediate contact with the public, and its greater power to convince’ (2000:53), thus in the case of Encompass suggesting the possibility of the community or ‘society’ as having a significant dominance over the departments choice of topics on which to base its work. In continuing her story, Emily discusses a conference created and run in conjunction with Encompass and its impact on participants regarding ‘its power to convince’ (2000:53),

‘it really alters their [the participants] perceptions of, … the community way of thinking, because those young people are the future, but they also go home and they have an influence on others around them so could go hey Mum and Dad or grandparents these asylum seekers come over here, so well actually no they don’t, and could actually start to change things so when they’re out in the community they see somebody they don’t cross over the street or road, … before the kids would just cross over the street but now they’re sort of dragging their parents over to say hello, and that makes such a big difference, it can alter the community, … so for the community around to understand and support them, that makes it a much nicer environment, … I think that’s what hits the young people, that they hear about things, but actually seeing it, an elderly person in their own home being frightened because they don’t know what’s happening to them and they haven’t got support around them, suddenly gets them thinking and you see things like that immediately but then you see how that effects them’.

Thus, through the act of the young people going home and having ‘an influence on others around them’, not only are the participants individually re-evaluating their previously held conceptions of marginalized groups within the community, but they are also challenging those with whom they are connected to consider their own thoughts and feelings on the topic in question; potentially leading to collective change. To borrow from Boal’s (2000:165) discussion of social interpretation, ‘the actors began to build their characters from their relationships with others’, just as interaction with participants may affect those in their social circles as within Emily’s example, so that ‘the characters started to be created from the outside inward’ (Boal, 2000:165), referring to the knowledge gained by Encompass event attendees being shared with others for the purpose of inviting them to re-evaluate their previously held conceptions of asylum seekers and refugees entering the community.
9. Conclusions and Recommendations

In considering notions of inclusivity in Encompass’s work involving marginalized groups within local community such as asylum seekers and refugees, Linden and Cermak’s (2007:46) notion that ‘The fusion of participants’ horizons or backgrounds can lead to deeper, more ‘truthful’, or enlarged, understanding of a problematic’ becomes apparent. As ‘communities are becoming increasingly multicultural’ (Lynn, 2012:40), the need for inclusivity within communities becomes increasingly prudent while also becoming increasingly problematic as existing community members may demonstrate a fear of the unknown or other, entering the area.

The paper discusses the outcomes of the cultural animation process within the theatre outreach department’s work for both marginalized individuals and community members, concluding that positive situational outcomes are possible and can therefore lead to an easier process of integration for those seeking to enter the community while also making the acceptance of such individuals an easier process for those community members currently in residence. In addition the paper posits that both catharsis and re-evaluating previously held concepts are direct results of the cultural animation processes employed by Encompass during their work and as such have the potential to contribute to a smooth transition period between migrant and community member status, with positive connotations for both the existing community and those transient individuals wishing to enter the community.

While this study seeks to shed light upon the outreach practices of a theatre department additional research into the application of theatrical techniques to community, rather than organizational problems is necessary in order to fully understand the potentially wide spread uses of engagement methods such as cultural animation in solving societal problems.

Acknowledgements

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## Appendix

### Table: 1

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