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CATHARSIS THROUGH THEATRE: CREATIVE METHODS OF ENGAGEMENT

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This paper explores the work of a theatrical outreach department in the UK via an ethnographic approach. In particular, the paper aims to demonstrate that the use of creative methods of engagement, such as cultural animation, have therapeutic effects on wellbeing and can ultimately lead to catharsis for participants and practitioners alike. The paper explores and reflects upon the potential for a 'reversal of catharsis' by pointing out that while creative methods of engagement can lead to catharsis for participants, theatrical outreach practitioners should also be mindful of internalizing the community's problems as their own. This, the paper suggests, leads to burnout and emotional exhaustion.

Key words: Catharsis, Community, Creative methods, Ethnography, Theatre

Introduction

Catharsis is best defined as the process of deriving therapeutic effects upon wellbeing from a particular experience or practice. This paper explores the attainment of catharsis from the perspective of a theatrical outreach department's practitioners and participants. Utilizing an ethnographic approach, it provides evidence that theatrical activities, such as cultural animation, have the potential to facilitate catharsis for participants by providing comfortable and relaxed surroundings in which to experiment, play and learn through activities and craft. However, the paper also explores the darker side of such methods by reflecting on the possible negative effects of immersive and creative experiences. In what is described here as 'negative cathartic experiences' the paper suggests that those facilitating creative methods like cultural animation need to remain mindful of the psychological effects upon their own wellbeing. The paper warns that while worthwhile as a means to bridge the practitioner-academic gulf, the result of facilitating catharsis for others may be damaging. While there has been a flourishing of interest in the development of such new methods, little is known about their potential harms which is the central contribution of this paper.

In order to excavate the methodological and social issues surrounding creative methods, the paper explores the work of an award winning theatrical outreach department, based in the Midlands, UK, anonymised throughout this paper as Encompass. Encompass works with community members, including those facing issues such as learning, economic, or social difficulties and partners with organizations and institutions locally, nationally, and internationally. The department's goal is to help people to 'find new and positive ways to understand themselves, their communities and their responsibilities', ultimately attempting to challenge 'destructive and anti-social behaviour'; building 'self-awareness and self-worth', while also developing 'positive attitudes' (www.anon.org.uk/education-and-community/anon). Encompass uses innovative methods of engagement with its participants, including that of cultural animation. Cultural animation shares some similarities with Participatory Action Research (PAR) but is different in that fun, creative and dramatically informed approaches are more explicitly used to generate collaboration. The department performs its work through a variety of methods, including workshops, conferences, performances and festivals, building strong connections between Encompass practitioners and local community members through its varying means of interaction.

The paper begins with a review of the academic literature on catharsis. This is followed by the methodology, in which the study's choice of the interpretivist paradigm and the data collection methods of semi-structured interviews, participant observation, document analysis and photography are discussed. The paper moves next to a discussion of the potential to facilitate catharsis through theatrical activities, during which empirical evidence illuminates Encompass's participants' and practitioners' thoughts about attaining catharsis, both personally and for others. Finally, the paper offers its conclusion, suggesting that creative methods such as cultural animation can help to facilitate the attainment of catharsis for participants. The paper also suggests, however, that the potential for negative cathartic transfer also exists, about which theatre practitioners should be particularly mindful during their work with community members.

Catharsis in context

The current literature on the topic of catharsis offers several definitions of the term. Paskow (1983:59), for example, defines catharsis as undergoing 'a *purgation* or *purification* of emotional states', while Hanes (2000:70) suggests catharsis is a way in which we can 'discharge or release pent-up emotions'. In a similar vein, Thomas (2009:626) suggests catharsis as an 'appeal to the individual to change his or her life', while Paskow offers further explanation by suggesting that individuals engaged in cathartic processes may ultimately experience pleasure due to the removal of 'emotional pressures' (1983:60). While the definitions of catharsis offered by the literature vary somewhat in their explanation of the term, typically the literature presents a view of catharsis as a positive way in which individuals can feel better through the release of negative emotions.

The literature also acknowledges the usefulness of catharsis in a variety of settings, such as with John's (2013) study of IsiZulu prison theatre, or Westwood's (2004) study of catharsis through using the comedic turn in organizational settings. Hanes (2000:72), however, diverts from the overwhelmingly positive view presented by the literature, stating that a release of emotion may be 'overwhelming' for some individuals. Hanes (2000:72) further suggests that, this may 'lead to "re-doubling" of defence', leaving the individual feeling 'threatened' if a suitable timeframe is not employed in attempts to attain catharsis.

From a theatrical perspective, the literature often suggests catharsis as something to be attained in watching a drama, rather than through personal participation in theatrical activities. Indeed, 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'. Lesavre (2012:248) further notes that theatre can help audience members to achieve catharsis through allowing them to 'discharge their impulses, fantasies or anxieties by living through the hero or the situations depicted before their eyes'. Similarly, Meisiek (2004:799) considers theatrical performance as representing 'a duplication of reality'. While Meisiek's (2004) notion suggests that audience members may consider the performance in relation to their own lives, the story being told on stage may, in actuality, differ greatly to the issues actually unfolding within community life.

In addition, works of art are viewed by the literature as having the capacity to act as a medium through which individuals can portray their feelings and opinions (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009). This further suggests art as an inclusive way for individuals to connect and engage in cathartic activities, as in using an object of art as a medium, no one individual's view can be seen in higher regard than another's. Furthermore, the literature accepts creative methods as a tool for learning (Sutherland, 2012; Taylor and Ladkin, 2009). One such example becomes evident in John's (2013) discussion of his work in correctional facilities. John (2013:95) notes that, offenders were able 'to 'return to the scene' without the 'real-time' consequences of actions and reactions'. As such, the literature points towards creative methods as an alternate way of learning by which individuals are able to consider their actions, or potential actions, in another light.

While finding the cathartic process an ultimately positive experience for those who choose to engage with such activities (Hanes, 2000; Paskow, 1983; Taylor and Ladkin, 2009), the literature, however, also places emphasis on the personal commitment to and participation with cathartic processes. Hanes (2000:70), for example, notes that a previous client 'employed art materials to produce an effigy of her abuser, which she fastened to an alter and repeatedly stabbed with sharpened pencils'. In doing so, the 'enactment provided an outlet for latent emotions and aggressive drives which could not be expressed in daily life' (Hanes, 2000:70). As such, Hanes (2000) points towards the use of an object of art as a medium for expression (Taylor and Ladkin, 2009).

As with the study of the abused individual (Hanes, 2000), cathartic processes including the use of artistic props as a medium, can be seen as inspiring confidence to address community issues. While the literature tends to focus on the case of the individual, increased confidence through cathartic release can also prove beneficial to the wider community. As Mattern (1999:60) notes, if 'Art captures human experience and renders it meaningful for others, then a legitimate window into the identity and history of a people is its art'. As such, Mattern (1999) is helpfully pointing to how the confidence building effects of catharsis for an individual can make positive experiences for other community members possible. While still exploring the notion of confidence building through catharsis, Cox's (2012:123) work lends focus to the notion of victimhood within a theatrical perspective, suggesting that,

'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)'.

Indeed, Cox's (2012) suggestion brings to the fore the role of catharsis in bringing together community members, regardless of their backgrounds. The literature typically suggests catharsis as an ultimately positive process for the majority of individuals engaged in theatrical activities but is lacking in information as to whether an individual gaining catharsis may have an effect on the practitioners who facilitate the attainment of catharsis for others which is a gap that this paper is contributing to.

Lafreniere and Cox (2013:325) suggest that, 'Different audience members can and will extract diverse meanings from the same set of data'. If both practitioners and their clients can be seen as audience members, they will both have quite different experiences of the same cathartic process. As Durden suggests (2013:274), 'a work will have different significance and will manifest different degrees and shadings of emotion in different audience members', suggesting that both practitioners and their clients may not both have a similarly positive cathartic experience. This leads us to the notion that '*playing* oneself on stage is not simply a matter of *being* oneself' (Clark and Mangham, 2004:48), suggesting that practitioners may have to project a positive exterior, regardless of their actual, that is, lived emotions.

Methods and Methodology

Underpinned by an interpretive paradigm (Burrell and Morgan, 1992), this study is informed by the view 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). In doing so, this working paper acknowledges that participating individuals may hold multiple and differing accounts of shared experiences and events. The evidence gathered during this study was collected via 23 semi-structured interviews, approximately 50 hours of participant observations (resulting in more than 100 pages of field-notes), document analysis and photography. Interviews were conducted either in person, by telephone or by Skype and occurred at the interviewee's location and time of choice. All participants were provided with a pseudonym to protect their anonymity.

As the study was of an ethnographic nature, a developing 'insider perspective' (Bell and Willmott, 2015:28) helped to create a 'common ground' (Abel et al., 2006:227) through which to gather data. The author's attendance at many Encompass events was also beneficial in creating a shared understanding of 'local and cultural knowledge' (Abel et al., 2006:232), ultimately creating a deeper understanding of the data collected during the interview process. Following transcription of the interview data, a thematic analysis was employed in order to identify key findings and commonalities. Data triangulation was also employed in order to ensure consistency and to identify any irregularities within the data that had been collected (Holland, 1999). The next section turns to a discussion of the main case and the empirical findings from the study.

Breaking the fourth wall: The work of Encompass

The theatre in which Encompass is situated holds a rich and unusual history, with its first artistic director being known for his 'passionate commitment to breaking the fourth wall of the proscenium arch stage, and rooting a resident company of actors, writers, musicians and designers in the local community' (www.theguardian.com/anon). This was an unusual idea in the early 1960s and one which offered 'a unique vision of theatre in the community' (www.theguardian.com/anon). Indeed, in the early 1980s, the theatre's connections with its community became more apparent as local donations 'totalling over £1 million'

(www.theguardian.com/anon) were received in fund raising efforts for a new theatre building. Six years later, the theatre completed this move, becoming 'Europe's first purpose-built theatre-in-the-round' (www.theguardian.com/anon). Aside from recognising the impact of the new theatre building within the developing local community, the theatre's artistic director's work placed emphasis on documentary drama productions, lending focus to the real life issues challenging the community.



Figure one: The theatre's original premises (www.anon.org.uk/about-us/history/).

The Encompass department itself was established between 1998-1999 as an attempt to connect with the local community and in response to the Single Regeneration Budget (SRB), a government funded initiative which aimed to encourage regeneration in post-industrial areas. Encompass gained its name as a consequence of the issues affecting the local community, representing those who were viewed as being disproportionate takers who were longer seen as active citizens in the community. As Encompass's director notes, "it's not about being constrained by borders but we like to rub those borders out and mess them up a bit and kind of smudge the borders and push the boundaries of things" (from interview). Indeed, Encompass's name can be viewed as reflecting the department's desire to inspire individuals

to see themselves and others differently while also improving the lives of marginalized individuals within the community.

While Encompass began with only two members of staff, one of whom is its current director, the department has expanded to include five additional staff members. Continuing from its beginning to the present day, Encompass frequently utilizes the theatre's mainstage in the round to create community performances, linking back to the original theatre director's focus on documentary drama. In doing so, community members are able to tell their own stories, rather than those same stories being portrayed by a professional actor with no lived experience of the issue. Encompass works locally, nationally and internationally on a multitude of community based issues and has formed research partnerships both locally and abroad. The department engages with the community and its partners through diverse methods of interaction such as conferences, training, workshops and events. In doing so, Encompass activities are often transferred from the physical theatre building to secondary locations, including public spaces and institutional premises. Indeed, Encompass views itself as a 'shape-shifting' organization which can actively respond to the changing needs of its community. For example, a recent Encompass project dealt with the issue of using mobile phones while driving and on other occasions has investigated myriad social issues of relevance to everyday life. The department also facilitates regular groups for community members, such as learning about technical theatre, drama groups and a young people's theatre company.

Encompass typically begins such activities with games designed to 'break the ice' and to encourage participation and familiarity between group members. Such activities can be seen under the umbrella term of cultural animation, a technique developed by Encompass which underpins many of the activities that they do. Cultural animation aims to remove individuals from their usual environments and to inspire them with the potential for individual and collective change. In doing so, diverse groups of stakeholders can be brought together, allowing for the exploration of community issues in unusual ways, resulting in creative methods of problem solving. This process occurs naturalistically but several stages in the practical tasks and exercises are key: First, through brokering knowledge sharing and exchange, participants are exposed to a wide range of views from other group members, facilitating learning about both current community issues and the participants' own views of the problem. Second, using objects to create the right conditions for sharing ideas and

generating new thoughts. Encompass often takes advantage of the use of aesthetic and symbolic props within its session, facilitating a way in which creative methods can offer an alternate way of thinking about and visualizing problems. Indeed, the use of props can provide Encompass with an additional way in which to involve participants within discussions and activities, even if that individual may feel they have nothing to contribute or would usually find participating emotionally difficult. Third, the process actively seeks to create the right conditions for empathy. The department frequently asks participants to put themselves in the position of a marginalized individual. For example, Encompass has access to a life sized wooden boat which is often used on the theatre's mainstage, with participants being asked to enter the boat with only one possession to take with them to a new world.

Such practical acts, creatively used as ways of thinking about the position of self and other, may appear playful but have the effect of removing status barriers. As individuals are unlikely to have previously participated in a similar activity, no one individual can be seen as an expert, regardless of their usual professional or personal status. For example, if both a student and a teacher were to participate in a cultural animation activity, both would have the same opportunities to share their views and neither would be regarded as more relevant than the other. This eradication of the primacy of expert-status is vital to supporting empathy and mutuality in the exercise.



Figure two: Example of an Encompass cultural animation activity.

Figure two shows how everyday items (in this case sticky tape, buttons and paper) formed the focus for group work. At the outset of the task, participants were encouraged to reflect upon the idea of food within their community. Initially being given an assorted pile of buttons, participants were asked to identify food related enterprises and opportunities within the local area (for example, food banks or supermarkets). Participants were then encouraged to show the connections between these groups as they were perceived within the community.

Facilitating catharsis through theatrical activities

Encompass's work can be viewed as successful in facilitating catharsis for the participants of its activities. Indeed, the effects of the department's work can be seen to further effect the wider community, as individuals who have achieved cathartic release during Encompass activities become more positively involved with community life. However, due to Encompass's emphasis on co-production in working *with* rather than *for* community, the department's practitioners may internalize the issues of the community members with which they work. Indeed, Encompass practitioners may internalize the need to survive 'the wrecking ball of modernity' (Kohn and Cain, 2005:363) on behalf of the community. The paper next discusses the potential for catharsis through theatrical activities, lending focus to the notions of positive life choices, building confidence and gaining a sense of peace through participation in Encompass activities. The paper then continues with a discussion of the potential for negative cathartic effects for Encompass practitioners who attempt to facilitate catharsis for the department's participants. In the following section, the paper turns to some of the practical effects of engaging in such exercises and draws upon the ethnographic data to highlight the voices of those who have participated in cultural animation. These aspects of the process are presented as forms of catharsis.

Catharsis 1: Making positive life choices

Burvill (1986:87) offers the notion 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.' Indeed, Burvill's notion can be seen within the opinions offered by Lexi, the current director of Encompass, in her tale of how two individuals have changed their lives for the better following 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 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 throughout applied-theatre performances.’ (2013:288-289). Indeed, Durden’s notion becomes further apparent as discussion from Adelaide, the artistic director of the theatre housing Encompass, lends focus to the cathartic journey undertaken by several participants in Encompass activities;

‘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.’

Adelaide’s account hints at several instances where catharsis has been obtained by Encompass participants. In particular, the story of the ‘painfully shy’ participant demonstrates catharsis, indicating positive future actions following participation with Encompass activities. Furthermore, Lola, a frequent Encompass participant and member of the young people’s theatre company, suggested that through involvement with the department 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’ suggests she may have felt uncomfortable in engaging with individuals from backgrounds different to her own, prior to

her participation in Encompass activities. Indeed, this suggests that Lola has attained catharsis through the release of negative emotions that she previously held towards such individuals within the community.



Figure three: Props used by Encompass during a cultural animation activity.

Newman (2012:58) notes that, 'Once audience members are moved from their comfortable theatre seats, they can become part of the space, shaping it with their movement, potentially engaging in phenomenological experience of the performances which utilises all of their senses'. Indeed, Newman's notion of engagement can be seen in the recollections of Alyssa, a long-time Encompass participant, in her discussion of attending an Encompass workshop in Japan;

'one of the participants was profoundly deaf [a young woman], ... 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 in 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 story is lovely, ... [Encompass's director] 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 illuminates the cathartic release gained by both herself and the deaf participant. Indeed, the piece of art given in return for the scarf provides 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).

Catharsis 2: Confidence building

Catharsis can also be seen in the outcome of Encompass activities designed to facilitate confidence building for participants. Indeed, such activities can create a sense of achievement and control for participants who may typically view themselves as having 'no *agency*, no control over their lives and decisions' (Baxter, 2013:264). Hadley, an Encompass practitioner, discussed confidence building and catharsis in her recollection of a previous Encompass project;

'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 successful work with the Go-dwell group illuminates the attainment of catharsis for an initially pessimistic group of participants. Through the removal of the participants' initially negative doubts about the project, confidence and catharsis can be seen as gained by these individuals due to their change in mind-set and the successful completion of the project. In addition, Hadley's account of the participant gaining the confidence to enrol in college offers further evidence of the attainment of catharsis, as the individual in question can be seen as having removed doubts about her own capabilities and potential.

Building on the notion of self-doubt, Alexis, an Encompass practitioner, suggested that she finds elements of cathartic release in letting go of her fears surrounding her work;

'I do lots of stuff that I never thought I would do, ... I never really thought that I'd be quite happy saying, "oh I tell you what you guys are busy so I'll do adventure group this week or just go play some games or we'll do ... stuff", I never really thought I'd be quite comfortable doing that sort of thing, ... I really hate making stuff, it's like my absolute pet hate, I really hate it, and I was really, I am quite crap at it as a general rule, but I'm getting slightly better.'

Alexis can be seen as illuminating her engagement with the cathartic process during her work, while she can also be seen as building confidence, allowing her to expand her working activities. Harry, a long-time Encompass participant, also offers evidence as to how the work of Encompass has allowed him to engage in cathartic release and to build his confidence levels. In discussing a group project and performance, Harry noted that;

'we had a week, to, put it [a performance] together, from scratch, we did the performance, the first performance here at the theatre', after that week, one week later, then we took it to London, and spent hours on the motorway, and I didn't get back until like two in the morning, and had to be on the road to Leicester the

following morning, ... when you sit back and realised, my God, you know, what a week, what have we done! What have we achieved! In less than ten days, we put a piece of theatre together and performed it three times all over the country, ... absolutely crazy, exhausting, and then afterwards you sort of woke up in the morning thinking my God that was fun'.

A further story, offered by Finn, an Encompass participant since childhood, discusses his own sense of catharsis and that of the young people with whom he works, in participating in Encompass activities;

'I really enjoyed when I was younger being involved and doing the pantos, so I played a dame in both the pantos, I loved doing it, I loved to come along and my highlights were getting away from everything and coming and being involved in these shows, getting tickets to go and watch the shows, and coming and being part, if I could take anything, my one main highlight, was, the feeling, when the young people took a bow on the stage, and after they just pulled it off, with nothing, I just didn't expect it at all, you know, and I kind of saw what other people saw when we were young people, it was brilliant, it was, probably the best thing, one of the best feelings I've ever had, of being proud, because I know where they've come from, I know their backgrounds, I know what they've been through, and then for them to put everything aside, to not think about themselves, to think, we need to do this to raise money or someone's not going to get a Christmas present, and to actually pull it off, it's the most amazing thing I've ever seen'.

Indeed, Finn's story demonstrates his own attainment of catharsis through his previous involvement with Encompass activities. Through engagement with Encompass activities, Finn was able to remove the negative associations he held for his daily life as a young person in care. Furthermore, Finn's observations of the young people with whom he works as growing in confidence through their engagement with Encompass activities, suggests that the young people may achieve a similar cathartic release through their involvement with the production, allowing them to gain confidence and an element of control of their daily lives. In a similar vein, Emily, a professional who works with Encompass to create a yearly event, offers the story of Claire. Emily suggested that Claire had achieved a sense of catharsis and growing levels of confidence through her interaction with Encompass and its activities;

‘[Claire], who was a volunteer, a young lady with cerebral palsy ... she actually comes and volunteers in an admin work role and as a care ambassador with us, she goes out to schools, talks about being a young person with a disability, about using services, about not using services, because most people think that she does but she actually doesn’t, but she does support her mum and actually cares for her mum, so she’s a carer herself, and we’ve put her through her NVQ in administration, ... there’s been another one who was a young person again, who, was an [Encompass] volunteer, ... she carried on with us as a care ambassador going into schools, and last week it was lovely she asked for a reference and some interview tips and then she rang and said she’d got the job within the care sector, ... it’s the young people’s faces you know, and some of the reactions, and seeing the effect it has on them in the long term, and going back to see them afterwards, ... it still lurking in their mind’.

Catharsis 3: A sense of peace

In addition to building confidence, Encompass activities designed to facilitate catharsis through creative methods can also enable participants to achieve a sense of peace. As Scharinger (2013:107) suggests of theatrical activities, ‘the process of engagement and creation of such a performance is just as important [as the outcome]’. Such an example is offered by Stana, an Encompass practitioner, in her discussion of parades;

‘I like parades because they are big, I like doing stuff, I like making stuff, so parades are good for me, and there were quite a few where I had to make everything on my own, and I was always very at peace with myself, ... I like achieving something quickly as well’.

Allie, a professional who has previously collaborated with Encompass on several projects, further illuminates the importance of a focus on process during theatrical activities, in discussing her experience of an Encompass workshop;

‘I really liked going to the theatre and being, you know, being put in the boat with you know, the sound engineering, ... and there’s something about, just stepping onto the stage and into the boat and into the magic of theatre, ... there’s something about being able to step into it in a playful way, ... and to see it being used to help people, is particularly special to me, and hearing ... the stories of local people through a

magical piece of sound work, was lovely, it was very moving, and to experience the moving stories of others while interacting with people I knew and I didn't know ... was a very magical moment'.

Indeed, Scharinger's work (2013:107) further suggests that, 'in working with victims of violence such a process [when process is seen as more important than results] 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 engage in social activism'. Scharinger's work can certainly be seen to resonate with an example of an Encompass workshop attended by Thea, a volunteer and professional who frequently works with Encompass;

'I think for me the highlight was very much that workshop, where we had all those props and there was, in my group ... a guy who had used food banks ... and was in, you know, a difficult situation in his life, but he was there to take part in the workshop, was enjoying it, [he] understood the issues from different perspectives'.

Thea's example illuminates an individual in a difficult decision, however, also provides evidence of the importance of the artistic process in allowing the individual to attain catharsis. Indeed, due to his engagement in Encompass activities, the individual was able to gain, albeit temporarily, a sense of peace, as he considered the different perspectives associated with use of the food bank. Likewise, Cici, an Encompass participant, demonstrates the ability to gain a sense of peace through Encompass's use of creative methods. She suggested that after her attendance at an Encompass workshop on volunteering she underwent a positive cathartic experience;

'I think because it was on volunteering, I was just thinking that oh that's a wonderful thing to do, I'm not volunteering for anybody, I've done some voluntary work in the past, but that day made me feel like I've done really good if I did volunteering at some point'.

Discussion: The downside of catharsis?

Encompass practitioners appear to be facilitating potential solutions to the community's problems through their daily work. Many such issues can be seen as 'wicked problems' (Grint, 2010) that have no ultimate solution and the potential to be repeated, even if a viable solution can be found. As such, this constant exposure to the community's problems has the potential to result in negative thoughts and feelings for Encompass practitioners. For example, Stana discussed her experience of facilitating a parade within the local community. While for some the opportunity to organize such an event may be seen as a positive cathartic experience, for Stana, the event brought feelings of disappointment both in the event and of herself;

'I'm never extremely happy with myself, so I always would like it to be more or bigger or better or something, ... like for example from this parade, I was like oh the weather was crap, proper horrible, oh all our lanterns and everything we made just melted half way through it and I was like ahaha just horrible, but on the other hand I came and I was like but this boy was there, and it was amazing and you know, I could hear the kids from youth theatre, youth club from like miles away because they were coming for this parade and they were making so much noise, in a good way, and I was like "oh my God they're coming, it's amazing", and it was great, but I was like it was shit'.

Stana's example provides evidence of a varied mix of emotions stemming from her involvement with the parade. While she points out the positive aspects of the parade, such as the children's attendance and the items that had been made for the event, she also places focus on the negative aspects such as the weather and her opinion that the event was 'shit'. Indeed, Stana's example suggests the need for further consideration of Durden's notion that, 'As ethical practitioners we may need to scrutinize the emotional journey that we are taking the audience on' (2013:288). However, rather than consider Durden's suggestion with the members of the public who attended the parade, it could instead be considered in line with the 'emotional journey' (2013:288) of Encompass practitioners.

Ava, an academic who has previously worked with Encompass on several projects, discussed the negativity that Encompass practitioners endure on a daily basis, as such, suggesting that Stana's experience is not an isolated one. Ava noted,

'I definitely don't know how [Encompass's director] deals with all this negativity and I mean some of them [young offenders], when I heard them speak it really upset me.'

Ava's comment illuminates the frequency of the potential for negative catharsis for Encompass practitioners. Indeed, Ava's account suggests cathartic effects of theatrical activities as a two-way street, with the potential for negative side-effects for the practitioners who attempt to facilitate positive cathartic experiences for community members through their interactions with the theatre. There are similarities in the experience of negative catharsis between those engaged in emotionally draining or emotional work such as healthcare professionals, hospitality and airline workers.

The problem highlighted by such cases is that work requiring the manipulation of one's self to conduct a particular performance can lead to burnout. Indeed, the act of attempting to appear to be of a positive disposition when frequently faced with negativity from others may require the creation and use of an alternate identity (Goffman, 1974). In adopting an alternate identity, individuals are able to portray a positive disposition, such as in the case of Encompass practitioners. However, such individuals may still internalize this negativity, regardless of whether this is perceived by another, with the creation of such a façade also potentially contributing to burnout. Given the potential harm that such fatigue might cause, this warrants significantly more attention within the growing literature on creative and cultural animation methods.

Conclusion

By highlighting and reflecting upon data collected via an ethnographic approach, this paper has sought to shed light on the ways in which creative methods, such as cultural animation, can lead to catharsis within a theatrical outreach context. Several accounts of the attainment of catharsis are offered within this paper, illuminating the potential for the attainment of catharsis through theatrical activities for participants and practitioners alike. The paper has lent focus to the ways in which the attainment of catharsis through creative methods of engagement can encourage positive life choices, help participants to build confidence and to gain a sense of peace. Indeed, this paper suggests that theatrical activities designed to facilitate catharsis can ultimately become beneficial to both individuals and the community. At an individual level, participants suggested that the attainment of catharsis due to their

engagement with Encompass activities had allowed them to accomplish difficult tasks, such as interacting with other individuals, gaining qualifications and gaining a feeling of control over their lives. From a community perspective, participants suggested that gaining cathartic release from engaging with Encompass activities had also been beneficial; something that emerged in Finn's story of the young people completing the pantomime to buy gifts for others, or the participant who gained the confidence to go to college to become a nurse.

However, this paper has also considered the possibility of a negative side to the cathartic effects possible through creative methods of engagement within a theatrical outreach context. Within a context that has seen a growing enthusiasm for creative methods and for bridging the gap between academia and community members, it is easy to overlook the potential for harm. I present an important rejoinder to such enthusiasm, not to discredit cultural animation, but to point to a potential downside that has yet to be investigated with ethnographic methods. Indeed, this paper has argued for the potential for negative cathartic effects for practitioners attempting to facilitate catharsis for others. In doing so, the paper argues that through Encompass practitioners' facilitation of catharsis for participants, they are exposed to the community's problems, which may become internalized. This is a subject deserving of significantly more attention that has hitherto been paid to it.

Further, I have suggested that there are lessons to be learned from emotion work in the business and organisation literature which may provide theoretical assistance to those keen to excavate this particular problematic. To conclude, this paper suggests that theatrical outreach activities have the potential to facilitate cathartic release for participants but the potential for a reversal of catharsis also exists. Indeed, theatrical outreach practitioners should be mindful of the potential for community problems to become internalized, rather, than allowing any negativity from participants to affect them on a personal level. Ascertaining how such resilience may be acquired represents the next step for those who spend their working lives committed to such therapeutic and creative practices.

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