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Performing a museum of living memories: beholding young people's experiences and expressions of care through oral history performance

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Prelude: towards 'hope', 'care' and 'civic engagement'

To be 'care-full', in these times, is to move against the grain; it is to announce oneself or one's project as ready and able to put others' needs in the foreground, to *lose time* caring. In this chapter, we will argue the obvious, which is also, strangely, the radical: caring will, ultimately, *save* us. And those of us who have been engulfed in a 'care-full' arts ecology know too well that the following is true: our art, our social relations, our intellectual contributions are all served by the fierce privileging of care. To act as though this is true is to be a part of a revolution.

In the introduction, Stuart Fisher explains that this edited collection places 'care in dialogue with performance.' This invitation has caused us, as co-authors, to reflect seriously on one of the fundamental reasons why we have both spent our professional lives making theatre with young people: it has the pedagogical potential to be a laboratory of care, a care that is not undemanding or simplistic, but complex and earned. As we have taken our step back from the swirling creative and research acts of our work together, in order to reflect on this central provocation, it strikes us that we are trying here to separate out into two languages an experience we shared that spoke in one language alone. It was 'care-full theatre making', 'caring performance', 'performances of our shared cares'; rather than dialogic, then, rather than the merging or relationship between two meaning systems, the creators and social actors of our project, occupying different roles, were nonetheless speaking a shared language and operating from an astonishingly lucid and singular meaning system.

In this chapter, we attempt to deconstruct what we experienced as a relational mode of being with others (Held, 2006) that we lived through as holistic, systemic and ecological. Perhaps the mere proposal of such an argument seems ludicrously optimistic when the lives, and life prospects,

of young people have been so destabilised by global economic and political uncertainty. Indeed, we have worried over reproducing a kind of writing about theatre that is altogether too celebratory and uncritical. But, we did experience something unusually caring and generous through this collaboration that was most certainly heightened by the surrounding cold-heartedness and self-interest of the larger social and political context, specifically the 2016 Brexit referendum in the UK and the rising popularity of divisive populism in the USA. Our chapter focuses on an oral history performance project in which the pedagogies of 'youth theatre' and 'youth work' coalesced, enabling new ways of understanding the aesthetics, pedagogy, politics and sociality of caring, in these most 'care-less', global times.

Youth, Theatre, Radical Hope and the Ethical Imaginary: An International, Intercultural Investigation of Drama Pedagogy, Performance and Civic Engagement (2014–19)

Our multi-sited, ethnographic research study funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada is the project through which we have collaborated over the last five years. Gallagher conceived of this study in order to think about disengagement in schools, and from civic life more broadly, as a precursor to, and driver of, youth social unrest around the world. Using a socially engaged and collaborative model of research, the project asks what makes the theatre workshop/classroom a forum of civic engagement in the present as well as an experience that may cultivate civic engagement later in life. Collaborating across universities, schools, theatres and youth community spaces in Toronto (Canada), Lucknow (India), Tainan (Taiwan), Coventry (England) and Athens (Greece), we examine how youth theatre making can cultivate practices, relationships, contrariness, dispositions and values that orient young people towards, and support them in, engaged and full citizenship. One early finding of this intentional pairing of performance and civic engagement has made clear that our understandings of civic engagement remain anaemic unless they recognise the necessary *relationality* of it, and we return to this idea in this chapter.

As demonstrated in Table 8.1, the larger *Radical Hope* project took place over five consecutive years. We have drawn upon a different model of drama or theatre pedagogy each year to investigate how these specific theatre-making practices with young people might give rise to their thinking about, expression of, or caretaking of their own and others' lives. The project was launched through a week-long collaborators' meeting in Toronto, where we aimed to make our distinct sites appreciable to one another.¹

Each year of the research, a different researcher-collaborator informed the mode of practice undertaken in all five sites. Each researcher-collaborator had creative agency to interpret these modes of practice and adapted the structure and content to suit their research contexts. Connecting

TABLE 8.1 Overview of the *Radical Hope* project 2014–19

Year	Mode of collaborative theatre making	Lead collaborator(s) guiding the mode of practice
Y1 (2014/15)	Verbatim	Artist Andrew Kushnir (creative director of Project: Humanity), Dr Gallagher and the Toronto Research Team, Canada
Y2 (2015/16)	Oral history performance	Dr Wan-Jung Wang in Taipei, Taiwan
Y3 (2016/17)	Devising and ensemble-based practice	Dr Myrto Pigou-Repousi and artist-practitioner Nikos Govas in Athens, Greece and Dr Rachel Turner-King at University of Warwick with artist-practitioner Jouvan Fucinni from the Belgrade Theatre, Coventry UK
Across all years	Feminist dialogic-performance practice of 'critical dialogues'	Dr Urvashi Sahni in Lucknow, India

these global/local investigations, Gallagher's Toronto research team visited and spent time with each of the different collaborators and their research participants in their specific locales. Andrew Kushnir, the embedded playwright for the *Radical Hope* project, and creative director of Toronto-based, socially engaged theatre company, Project: Humanity,² has produced a verbatim play, *Towards Youth*, created out of the data across all of the five sites of the study.³

In this chapter, we share findings from our Coventry site in the UK, specifically in year two of the wider international study when Turner-King partnered with the Belgrade Theatre's Canley Youth Theatre (CYT) and Coventry Youth Services to produce an 'oral history performance'. Turner-King led the planning and facilitation of the project in collaboration with Jouvan Fucinni, CYT director, and with the support of Angela Evans, youth worker for Coventry's Children, Learning and Young People's Directorate. Out of the Belgrade's seven youth theatre companies, CYT was the only group to have access to a trained youth worker. Evans' long-standing relationship with the local authority and her embeddedness within the socio-economically deprived area of Canley, meant that she was uniquely positioned to encourage new members to join the youth theatre, including a number of young people in the care system (Turner-King, 2018). Here, we focus on one such youth participant, Bruce, whose particular experience

of being ‘in care’ made its way into the rehearsal room and the final public performance.⁴ Turner-King considers the ways they struggled and experimented with the aesthetics of oral history performance in order to revisit and share significant memories of their pasts by focusing on the playful, relational and affective dimensions of improvisation. Immediately after this creative process, Coventry City Council announced severe cuts to its youth services, directly affecting the youth theatre group and its wider community (Lepper, 2017). This led to an inspiring political awakening in Bruce who initiated a multifaceted campaign against the proposed cuts. Bruce’s story acts as a hopeful counter-narrative to accounts that ‘seek to label, pathologise or categorise’ young people in care (Spence, 2007: 308).

Finally, we zoom out from Bruce’s particular story to offer a contextualisation of the wider sociopolitical context in which this project took place. Gallagher also adds details of her Toronto team’s visit (principal investigator Kathleen Gallagher, playwright Andrew Kushnir, research assistants Dirk Rodricks and Nancy Cardwell) to Turner-King’s research site in Canley, 21–30 June 2016. They observed the creative and caretaking rehearsal and performance work of the local team, during the week the UK voted to leave the European Union.⁵ Through our cross-comparisons of field notes, video footage from the weekly workshops and participant interviews, we aim to draw out the interrelationships between ‘hope’, ‘care’ and ‘civic engagement’ through our rendering of the relationality that was intrinsic to the oral history performance work and the nurturing of an arts ecology of care.

A theoretical frame for care

Gallagher’s previous study revealed that social support or care *given by adolescents to others* was positively correlated with their sense of engagement and achievement in school (Gallagher, 2014). Being deeply curious about these earlier findings, in evidence in both the quantitative and qualitative results of that study, Gallagher and her Toronto team aimed to turn towards a more robust examination of care in the current study and to do so with others across a range of different cultural, political and theatre-making contexts. Care is a much-debated concept in the subfield of philosophy and ethics in education with little agreement on a universal theory of care, despite much writing on the topic from such care theorists as Nel Noddings (see 1992; 1999; 2010b; 2010c, 2013). Noddings imagines a kind of caring relationship in education contexts where the carer is called not out of duty, but desire, to care for others, ‘acts done out of love and natural inclination’, she writes (1999: 219). Hedge and MacKenzie (2012) have rightly critiqued Noddings’ account of care for its failure to operate from a more comprehensive political theory or set of moral principles, and Houston (1990), before them, similarly challenging that care is not a stand-alone ethic. Importantly for this chapter, Noddings’ body of work seems to suggest that our capacity for care is finite and teachers ought to focus on what is before them, what

they might realistically be able to care for, rather than risk ‘empathic exhaustion’ by focusing too much on ‘unknown victims of poverty or injustice in some far away land’ (2010b: 12). This particular idea is especially provocative as Gallagher and her team attempted to make some sense of the kind and quality of care they witnessed as ethnographic researchers in Turner-King’s context of CYT. They felt that the care they witnessed seemed neither limited nor terribly inward-looking, despite having every reason to be inner-directed in the days immediately following the extraordinarily difficult Brexit referendum vote result and the remarkable sense of uncertainty that followed it.

Sociologists Kathleen Lynch, Maureen Lyons and Sara Cantillon, drawing upon extensive feminist literature on care, put forward a view of the ‘care-full’ citizen that recognises the care and love labour, and solidarity work that is not generally part of normative formal education trajectories. They consider the importance of ‘other-centred work, the work arising from our interdependencies and dependencies as affective, relational beings’ (Lynch *et al.* 2007: 2). They lament especially the lack of attention paid to ‘other care’ due to traditional education’s preoccupation with educating the rational, autonomous, subject, writing that: ‘The citizen carer and the care recipient citizen (and most people are both one and the other simultaneously) are only recognised in the educational arena when professionals are being trained as social workers, nurses, therapists, teachers, psychologists, social care workers and/or counsellors/therapists’ (Lynch *et al.* 2007: 4). Traditional education’s more pernicious neoliberal agenda, they argue further, concerns producing the resilient, self-sufficient or entrepreneurial citizen, capable of human capital acquisition. This ‘care-less’ model is focused instead on the privatised citizen, educated primarily for themselves; and education itself, a market service to be delivered. Intimate care work is, from this standpoint, a private matter. In short, whether it is classic liberalism or contemporary neoliberalism, the primacy of educating the autonomous, rational subject (clearly also one important aspect of education) has occluded the enormously important dimensions of human interdependency.

Even within the spheres of well-intentioned youth work, Julie Tilsen argues persuasively that an ‘individualist framework’ within education has drawn focus away from our ‘social/relational complexities’. She goes on to say: ‘Our attention is given to what is one’s “authentic self”, what is “in their heads” or “in their hearts”. With our interest solidly placed in this idea of interiority (that is, the stuff “inside” of people), all our efforts to shape, change, inspire, or otherwise influence others are directed at people’s “insides”’ (Tilsen, 2018: 14). Tilsen calls for youth workers to engage in a form of a critical pedagogy that goes beyond ‘essentialist notions of identity’ (2018: 16). While Tilsen’s ‘narrative approach’ to youth work emphasises well-rehearsed notions of social constructivism, her discussion of ‘storying’ is most intriguing. She argues that youth work is all about the ‘co-creation of meaningful stories and experiences through collaborative conversations with young people’ (Tilsen, 2018: 52). She likens the dynamics of this

relationship to a 'jazz improvisation' where 'performers listen and respond in the moment' (Tilsen, 2018: 63). This resonates with Richard Sennett's discussion of the ability to 'listen well' as a feature of cooperation that can manifest in non-verbal exchanges such as musical rehearsals (2012: 14). Tilsen suggests that when the youth worker and youth participant are engaged in the structured yet responsive process of 'storying', identity is 'multiple, fluid and emergent' (2018: 16). Likewise, the devising process, characterised by its potential dynamism, permeability and possibility, *can* provide young people with supportive space to play, experiment and rehearse their emerging youth identities (Gallagher and Mealey, 2018).

While developing CYT's 'voices' and each individual's sense of self was a key aspect of Fucinni and Evans' intersecting caring practice, there was a shared ethos around fostering the group's sense of interconnectedness, not just to each other but to their wider world.⁶ This played out in subtle, gentle and non-coercive ways. If a young person volunteered a story about something that had happened during their week, Fucinni and Evans would often relate by offering something from their own lives, asking the others what they felt and/or by drawing connections to current social and political issues. Critically, they made time and space within the structure of their workshop plan for conversations to intersect, diverge and transgress. This open and responsive type of 'hospitality' within the informal youth space is often sorely lacking within the confines of the formal education system (Turner-King, 2018). The potential 'liminal space' presented by youth clubs, Sevasti-Melissa Nolas argues, 'offer young people the opportunity of identity development and the crafting of biographical narratives, both in terms of being and becoming, as old identities are shed and new ones adopted' (2013: 34). Our project with CYT aimed to offer them opportunities to explore and *reperform* their emerging 'biographical narratives'.

Barry Freeman has recently argued, using an example of Indigenous theatre makers in Canada, that theatre does not simply represent the world, but models 'alternative ways of being in the now' (2016: 25). How could oral history performance, through its focus on personal narrative and past memories, open up a space for CYT members to explore 'alternative ways of being in the *now*'? In no way could we have envisaged the extent to which one youth participant, Bruce, would shift his identity from being the often-quiet, unassuming member of the group to the group's strongest community activist.

Care as civic engagement: 'I consider it as a home'

To tell the story of Bruce, we have to start at the end of our project. In July 2016, just one week after our public performances, Coventry City Council announced severe cuts to its youth services, directly affecting the CYT and its wider community.⁷ While the Belgrade Theatre was committed to sustaining this youth theatre group, the wider services and some of its key sites

were facing closure. Bruce, a fourteen-year-old at the time, took it upon himself to create an online petition, part of which stated: 'I am utterly devastated and I will do everything and anything I can to prevent it. I attend Canley Youth Theatre, a group which has inspired hope, laughter and tears. In the centre there lies so many memories and I consider it as a home. It is our centre and the Coventry City Council cannot close it down' (12 July 2016).⁸ The poignancy of Bruce's words is heightened by the fact that he is a 'looked-after child' (LAC). He had been in the 'care system' for just over four years and was encouraged to join CYT in 2015 by his foster mother, who recognised that he needed to develop his self-esteem and confidence. As the resident youth worker for Canley, Evans engaged directly with Bruce and his foster family. She described her work as 'behind the scenes care' but this was all too modest on her part. Obvious to all were the skilful ways she would continually yet subtly encourage Bruce to feel welcome in the group. Likewise, Fucinni made little openings within the context of the drama work for Bruce to participate. Unbeknown to Bruce, Fucinni and Evans would provide feedback to each other about their mutual efforts to engage him. They were all too aware that his attendance at the weekly sessions was precarious and that they had to earn his trust.

Helen Nicholson suggests that trust, underpinned by an ethic of care, is performed through the outward gestures and 'particular actions' of the body, 'trust is a performative act, which is publicly visible in social action' (2002: 88). These micro-gestures of care performed by CYT's leaders modelled a sociality and conviviality that was reflected in the youth group's behaviour towards each other. Repeatedly, the young people spoke about the friendliness of CYT, compared to their different experiences of school. Through a continual and negotiated process of engagement and relationality, Tilsen argues that in youth work, 'each relationship becomes a place of caring' (2018: 37). However, as Noddings reminds us, 'in order for the relation to be properly labeled caring, the cared for must somehow recognize the efforts of the carer as caring' (2010c: 391). We can begin to get a sense of Bruce's felt experience of care by considering the extent of his subsequent civic actions. After receiving over eight hundred signatures on his petition, Bruce wrote a letter to his local Member of Parliament (MP); participated in a 'silent protest' in the city alongside other youth groups; publicised his campaign in an interview for a local newspaper; spoke at a number of council events across the city and visited Parliament to protest against the cuts. Bruce's public display of care for the centre is indicative of the strength of the positive relationships fostered throughout his time in CYT.

While this project was not driven by an instrumentalist agenda to 'produce caring citizens', we are nonetheless interested in the ways our creative process and performance *may* have affected Bruce's sense of agency and voice. In the Introduction to this volume, Stuart Fisher suggests that 'the debates in this edited collection lay the ground for new modes of being together and a growing understanding of how certain performance practices can promote and aspire to a more caring and just society' (p. 14).

These proposals orient our analysis of a creative process, which moved interchangeably between the ontological and epistemological. The ways we behaved toward each other, related to each other and played together were linked inextricably to the generation of knowledge or, in this case, the material we *chose* to perform publicly. This was typified when Bruce's story about being in care became an integral part of the final performance. While it is impossible to trace back through the messiness of the devising process to find any linear narrative that might have led Bruce to care so actively and passionately about the closure of the youth services, we focus on two particular scenes of care that were created out of a tapestry of different moments from the hours spent together.

Encountering objects of care: Bruce's 'archive of memories'

Inspired by the methodology of 'oral history performance' outlined by one of our international collaborators, Wan-Jung Wang, we invited the youth group to bring in a 'significant personal object' (2010: 563). A well-known game in 'improv theatre', often associated with the work of Augusto Boal (2002), involves participants taking an object and reimagining it by gesturing its new function. For example, a cricket bat can become a paddle. Through play, we can create new ways of seeing an object. In oral history performance, however, the 'objects' are also the *subjects* of the drama; they carry meaning for the individual owners and, therefore, playing with the objects comes with a degree of risk. In our early explorations of the objects' meaningfulness, we arranged them around the space, explaining that the rehearsal room had become a museum of artefacts. The group members were invited to examine the objects, without conferring with one another. We emphasised to the young people that these objects mattered to someone but it was up to them to imagine why. Following this, they took up an object (not their own) and performed a possible moment that might have led to this object becoming significant. We then started to connect the different objects and images together by placing them into groups of three. We invited the group to interpret these new multilayered images and make random connections between their stories. This exploratory work was critical in opening up discussions about how and why 'things' have value and power. A recurring theme in each of the imagined stories was that these objects were gifts of some kind and this had made them valuable. Caring for a thing, an object, is often deeply rooted in our connectedness to others. In Jane Bennett's discussion of 'vibrant matter', we learn that non-human forms, the stuff and things of everyday life, are indeed full of life. This 'thing-power', she explains, is 'the curious ability of inanimate objects to animate, to act, to produce effects, dramatic and subtle' (Bennett, 2010: 6). Indeed, when Turner-King first noticed a 'Nintendo DS' among the collection of anonymous objects, it evoked feelings of irritation and disappointment. The group had been told to bring in something of *significance*, not a games console! So, when the objects were

returned to their owners and their stories revealed, the following exchange was surprising:

Bruce: This is my Nintendo DS. I got it in 2011 about three months after I went into care. It's cool because lots of people pooled together to get it. I took loads of pictures on it, and I like to look back at them as memories because ... they are pictures of someone out there I don't see anymore, some people, memories, places, and stuff; it's kind of basically like an archive of memories ... as well as for playing games [he smiles].

Rachel: I didn't know that you could store pictures on there. I had no idea.

Bruce: Yeah you can ...

Theo: I wouldn't have known ... I would have just thought you used it for games but ... the fact that it's got a sort of different identity in the way that you use it ... it's sort of different.

Rachel: Yeah we could just go 'Oh it's just a game' but actually it's a bit of treasure ... what did you say Bruce? It's an archive of memories?

Bruce: Yeah ...

Rachel: Beautiful. (Transcription from workshop, 7 June 2016)

In her discussion of the performative framework involved in capturing 'oral histories', Della Pollock argues that the 'ordinary conversation' becomes 'momentous' (2005: 3). In light of this, what makes a fleeting moment in a drama workshop feel momentous? In this instance, Bruce's capacity to articulate the story about the Nintendo as his 'archive of memories' was moving and arresting. The room seemed to swell with knowingness. Until this point, Bruce had never shared his experience of being in care. By choosing to share this story, the Nintendo was no longer *just* a games console; it was imbued with Bruce's story. As fellow group member Theo explains, the Nintendo, and perhaps Bruce too, now had 'a different identity'. When describing the political potential of oral history performance, Dee Heddson explains that:

Performing stories about ourselves might enable us to imagine different selves, to determine different scripts than the other ones that seem to trap us [...] Performing the personal in public might allow a connection between the performer and the spectator, encouraging the formation of a community or prompting discussion, dialogue and debate. (2007: 157)

We felt convinced that, if Bruce agreed to it, this story *should* be made public. However, recreating this moment for performance was challenging, both ethically and aesthetically. How could we 'take care' to recreate the sense of intimacy of our rehearsal space on a public stage? Could we expect the audience to care in the same way? And what about Bruce? We wanted to convey this significant memory of his past while also doing what Helen Nicholson describes in her applied theatre work as 'engaging in the present and imagining the future' (2016: 256). By performing these words again about his absent parents, did we risk 'retraumatisation' (Gallagher *et al.*, 2012: 37)? Or, if another member performed the words on his behalf, would the potency and poignancy of this moment be lost?

Handle with care: reperforming Bruce's story

When grappling with how to represent Bruce's object story in performance, we returned to the multiple notes and recordings of the weekly sessions. In her discussion of 'performed ethnography', D. Soyini Madison suggests that 'recording rehearsals is most helpful to remember and play back what in the moment might have felt inconsequential, but seeing it again in recordings, you might find something useable and profound to be carried forward to audiences (2018: 144). Two recurring themes from our workshops were the group's capacity to listen to each other and their sense of playfulness. The script had to convey and honour the joyful ways we had interacted and attended to each other as an ensemble. We returned to the initial dismissiveness Turner-King had felt about Bruce's Nintendo DS as an inspiration for a key transitional moment in the performance. As shown in this script excerpt, the group played with the idea that their objects were meaningless, things to be either ignored or mocked:

Luke: This is *just* a cane

Maya: This is *just* a sarong

Brian: This is *just* a ukulele

Amy: This is *just* a pendant

Ophelia: This is *just* a badge

Lorrie: This is *just* a quilt

Bruce: This is *just* a Nintendo DS

Connie: This is *just* a blanket

Theo: This is *just* a picture in a frame

Mike: This is *just* a home-made toy. (Unpublished script, 2016)

The group took great pleasure in performing these subversive 'uncaring' moments, which were enhanced through the use of a thumping, sinister musical backbeat and gloomy lighting effects. However, they could not have *played* with the objects in this way without having spent considerable time within our workshops caring for and investing in each other's objects. They understood that this was a moment of antithesis deliberately set up to create an atmosphere of tension immediately ruptured by the intimate and sensitive retelling of their memories.

When dealing with Bruce's object memory, we did not want to root Bruce in the past as this would not have been representative of Bruce's optimism about his future. Throughout our devising process, we had been drawn to the idea of *living* memories. We had discussed the ways we tell stories to keep memories alive and that, paradoxically, we are always in the process of creating memories and that this somehow keeps us facing towards our 'future selves.' When gathering stories about significant role models, Bruce had spoken about how participating in classes, run by the youth services, had supported him through a difficult period: 'I started to do, like, dance and drama to build my confidence to help myself. I had counsellors that I confided in ... we played games and talked ... I didn't feel embarrassed

anymore to say I'm a foster child' (Field notes, 3 June 2016). Bruce had gained this sense of empowerment through the care that had been shown by others and through his own strength of character. We felt this story should also be included in the public performance. And finally, during another improvisation when we were searching for ideas, Bruce had suggested that a piece of fabric could be lifted over the heads of the participants, mimicking a 'crowd-surfing' move he had witnessed in one of his dance classes: 'Did you know that in dance there's this move that you do where you can, like, lift people over your shoulders?' (Field notes, 14 June 2016). This was a vivid memory for Turner-King and her collaborators who were struck by Bruce's readiness to contribute and respond to his fellow peers. Though this utterance was totally disconnected from his discussion about being a foster child, Bruce's urge to share this idea captured an important and positive part of his emerging identity as a more confident ensemble player, and this felt important to represent.

In the final performance Bruce agreed to retell his Nintendo DS story. He climbed on to an empty chair positioned next to an audience member and spoke: 'Did you know that in dance there's this move that you do where you can like, lift people over your shoulders?' With that, his fellow group members arrived on stage while he called out, 'I'm not embarrassed anymore to say I'm a foster child' (Unpublished script, 2016). His teammates lifted him up and carried him aloft across the stage – the complex look of fear, concentration and victory etched on the young actors' faces – a daring choreography and care taking on display. As Nicholson suggests, it is unlikely that trust will be fostered through 'decontextualized trust exercises' (2002: 85); it manifests through the participants' investment in the drama itself. As depicted in the images taken during the dress rehearsal and the live performance (see Figures 8.1 and 8.2), they trusted each other not to let Bruce fall and Bruce trusted them because, collectively, they wanted to tell this story and tell it well. Echoes of this very caretaking of and through the drama emerged in other research sites, as Gallagher and team members have written (Gallagher *et al.* 2018). Performing this lift, in front of Bruce's foster family, was particularly poignant for Evans who later reflected that, 'it was a metaphor for Bruce's journey with us and all he's been through' (Personal communication, April 1, 2017).

By repositioning Bruce's object memory with verbatim lines from two other workshops, we hoped to honour Bruce's past memories while also representing Bruce's emerging identity. The audience had no knowledge of the significance of the 'back stories' that had played out in our rehearsal space; it was, however, important that the young people felt just how much we had valued their contributions. The final performance, therefore, was a realisation of the multiple expressions of care we had experienced over the weeks spent together. As critical pedagogue bell hooks suggests, an engaged pedagogy 'insists that everyone's presence is acknowledged [...] there must be an ongoing recognition that everyone influences the classroom dynamic, that everyone contributes' (1994: 8). We attempted to perform care to Bruce

Figure 8.1 CYT members rehearse the lift with Bruce

Figure 8.2 CYT members carry Bruce aloft during the live performance

and the rest of the group by demonstrating that we recognised them, we were living each moment *with* them, we had listened to them, their ideas mattered to us and they had affected us. Pollock proposes that the dialogic relationship between the interviewer and interviewee in oral history performance is ‘cocreative, co-embodied, specially framed, contextually and intersubjectively contingent’ (2005: 2). Our process of telling stories was *polyvocal* and the roles of ‘interviewer/interviewee’ were constantly shifting: members were invited to listen to each other’s stories on multiple occasions. In this hybrid form of ethnography and devised theatre, the script we produced was a composite of our shared and multiple exchanges, and we were able to use the theatrical space as a heightened, symbolic version of our workshop space. As Wang argues, in oral history performance, ‘personal narratives are retold and restructured due to the collaborative aspects of the performance. The “new perspectives” help the storyteller to see the stories differently’ (2010: 572).

Just after the performance event, Gallagher and her Toronto team conducted a series of focus group interviews:

Kathleen: Can you think of anything, however big or small, where you understood more about people, because of that work together?

Theo: Yeah it’s just, this uh, project was making a statement like, don’t underestimate things, sort of cause like, all of these objects and, they weren’t, they didn’t look that special, but things have a story behind them, everything has a story behind it. And I just think, that was, I was like, when I first saw all these objects, I was like, well, what’s so important about them? And then, when people told me these stories I was like, so shocked, and, how, how complex and how much these people cared for these things. (Transcription of interview, 30 June 2016)

Theo’s first encounter with Bruce’s Nintendo memory had remained and resonated with him. Perhaps this was because Theo himself was an adopted child and had also shared stories of his experiences. Whatever it was that had triggered this moment of connection and recognition, it is worth dwelling on the potential space that theatre creates for us to appreciate the world in ways that are more ‘complex’.

Between the local and global: seeking love and care in uncaring times

Gallagher has recently argued for the value of love in research, ‘a politically committed, seriously playful love, embedded in a reflexively relational methodological practice’ (2018: 106). Building from Dale Tracey’s (2017) theory of compassion from twentieth- and twenty-first-century ‘witness poetry’, which produces a ‘feeling with’ rather than a ‘feeling as’ an other, the effort is about getting to a place of nearness rather than likeness. As research collaborators in this multi-sited project, we have travelled worlds together

in our efforts to make sense of empirical moments of caretaking and care receiving, of creative generosity, of youth story-telling through theatre that have much to teach us about living the present differently and building a future fully conscious of, and better for, our ultimate inter-dependence.

Indeed, this ‘feeling with’ was so critical in the week we spent together when the Toronto team visited the Coventry site. The first thing the Toronto team experienced in Coventry was a lovely evening in Turner-King’s garden where we shared a meal, caught a post-rain rainbow and laughed heartily with the key adult players (Jouvan Fucinni and Angela Evans, research assistants and student participants, Rachel and her husband) in their ‘universe of care’ (Sahni, 2017). We borrow this term ‘universe of care’ from our Indian collaborator Urvashi Sahni. In our early collaborator meetings, she set the bar for the kind of ‘care-full’ schooling and theatre making to which we all aspired through the example of her girls’ school, Prerna, in Lucknow, India. She speaks particularly of ‘a web of mutually supportive relationships’ that we also experienced strongly in our Coventry site (Sahni, 2017: 64). This ‘adult caretaking’ was all the more welcome as it was unfolding on the evening following the UK’s European Union referendum results. The following day, the local group invited the Canadian visitors into their ‘storytime’ circle, a practice meant to be a brief sharing of feelings/experiences since the last meeting. We could see from the start that the rehearsal room was making space to acknowledge that we are all coming into the room with different preoccupations. This seemed a small but important attempt, a punctuation mark of sorts, to acknowledge that each of our lives is full and complex but we are now coming together and *listening* to each other before we create.

Kushnir’s play, *Towards Youth*, moves across the five sites of the study and, when it came to representing the work in Coventry, and the Canley Youth piece, *The Museum of Living Memories*, the character ‘Kathleen’ turns to the audience and simply says, ‘Something aesthetically stunning has to happen right now’. But nothing does. The character stares at the audience, waiting; the audience stares back. In other words, there would be no lame reproduction that could adequately convey to the theatre audience what had been witnessed in Canley’s youth-produced performance. No matter what unfolded on the stage at that moment, we knew that it would not be able to deliver the aesthetic simplicity yet sophistication, the deep and abiding trust among that young company of performers and the larger ‘universe of care’ that so evidently surrounded them. This question of ‘trust’ had been reflected back to us by an audience member during the Q&A after one of the Canley Youth performances:

Audience member: It strikes me that there is a lot of trust between you all and I just wondered, has that been hard work to get to? Have you had to really work on the trust bit? Does that take a while to achieve?

Connie (a young performer): I don’t know. A little bit. But every week, when we come together, we get closer each time. So you tell stories like John said and like, get to know each other a bit more each week. So, a little bit.

Theo (a young performer): And also we'll do like trust exercises. Like to do that lift with Bruce, that was quite a big thing. He had to trust us. But like, we've done it before, we've practised, and we've told him a lot about ourselves and he can trust us. (Transcription of discussion, 29 June 2016)

At another of the post-performance focus group interviews with the Gallagher team, one young performer turned the gaze back upon the visitors:

Theo: Uh ...What did the play mean for you?

Kathleen: Oh my goodness ... Um, I felt like I was in a room with people who I didn't know before and who didn't know me, and I felt quite warmly embraced. It made me feel hopeful, in a really deep way, because, we've come from Canada and we arrived at the time that your country is in a little bit of a mess, and there are lots of unknowns, and there's quite a lot of unhappiness and uh, fear, and so the fact that that was all going on and then we got to go into this magic place where people who had big important relationships with each other could open up the circle a little bit and say 'come look at what we're doing' – it kind of gave me a faith that I wasn't expecting to find.

Nancy (research assistant): I also saw that you guys couldn't really get hurt because you were taking such good care of each other throughout these rehearsals and process and performance and I felt so lucky to catch that. (Transcription of interview, 30 June 2016)

Our time together allowed us to see vividly the relationships between adults and young people, and among young people themselves, as instances of caregiving and care receiving (Hedge and MacKenzie, 2012) cultivated through creative and collective models of drama, in this most unsettling of weeks in the UK context. In particular, it helped us scrutinise what youth citizenship means beyond the logic of electoral/referendum politics when these young people were only beginning to understand their inheritance of a referendum within which they had had no vote or voice. In turn, this brought into focus the 'habits of the everyday through which subjects become citizens' (Isin and Neilsen, 2007: 17) and enabled us to examine the ways care and citizenship manifest as everyday practices. The play making and community-building process of the CYT was one of 'nearness', among young people and between them and their adult caregivers, theatre facilitators and local and visiting researchers. It was a space of intimacy and creative experimentation. In the uncertain days following the Brexit referendum, young and old alike felt in touch with their susceptibility to larger and unfeeling political forces, whatever 'side' they may have been on. After the divisive political rhetoric leading up to the vote, in which this very group of young people would inherit a future for which they held no decision-making power, many felt unsure about who their 'community' was. But, the Canley youth, by that time, had together built a caring ensemble they were determined not to lose.

Performance itself is an act of vulnerability. So, 'to care' in and through that vulnerability is one way to move through this precarious world, not perfectly, not without struggle, but with creative intention and political

agency. In the post-project interviews, we invited the members to reflect on the ways 'care' was performed as a group:

John: I think we've all had to care for each other ... and you, Jouvan and the other helpers, have all had to care for us ... and Angela of course ... cos erm ... otherwise we can't get through it without that ... because, obviously, you need to take an interest in *us* ... and it was really nice cos when I was having that down day, everyone seemed to notice. (Transcription of interview, 5 July 2016)

For John, care was *vital*; it enabled the group to 'get through' things. Critically, he experienced care through the interest shown by others. Care, like love, is unequally distributed among human beings. But the Coventry experience for all of us – in the heedless and dislocating days that followed the Brexit referendum result – was a fine example of 'care-full theatre making', 'caring performance' and 'performances of our shared cares' for locals and visitors alike. In *our* ecology, care and performance were simultaneously experienced and became, in the end, quite inseparable. Love and friendship drove the research methodology as well, making a virtue of our differences of social, generational and geographic location and becoming critical and fierce friends to one another.

While 'love' is not imparted by the state, 'care' is recognised as an official duty and government responsibility. Joan Tronto (2012) reminds us though that the nature of the care given is subject to the ideology of the current government as well as the constant flux of external socio-economic factors. As James Thompson laments, 'the habit of caring for others is devalued, placed at the whim of the market and radically under resourced' (2015: 435). Bruce had come to experience this first-hand through the Council's proposals to close down the very places he held dear. In his online petition, he wrote: 'Not only would you be taking down a building, you would be taking down a museum of living memories. People need to realise that not all kids are reckless juveniles and our centre proves that' (Field notes, 12 July 2016). Bruce's decision to rename the youth centre with the title of our performance, *The Museum of Living Memories*, is indicative of the impact it had upon him. Bruce's subsequent letter to his local MP is demonstrative of his awareness that the type of 'care' *now* being offered is not the same level of care he had benefitted from: 'One-to-one sessions will make vulnerable kids feel more vulnerable because they'll be excluded and singled out from kids they could potentially get along with. Isolation cannot help troubled kids; they need to release their problems by being able to have fun instead of sitting in an intimidating office being asked personal questions' (20 October 2016). The care that Bruce experienced in youth theatre is fundamentally about the experience of relationality. Being a 'looked-after child' in an official capacity, therefore, is an entirely different experience to being 'looked after' in the convivial site of the youth theatre workshop. Indeed, the care given, received and performed in this space is an important form of resistance to top-down, governmental notions of care. It may even crucially signal to us all 'alternative ways of being in the now'.

As for the wider *Radical Hope* research collaboration – the many local partnerships of academics, theatre makers and community organisations that comprise the global research network – we have taken the decision to move forward together into a new project, adding in a new partner in Colombia. The contagion of care has swept us all up and, as we look forward, we will turn more directly to the idea of youth artist-citizens performing for socio-ecological justice. A fitting turn for our expansive community that has faced adversity in a variety of local forms and now aims to create for the survival of the planet.⁹ It is no small objective, but our intergenerational energies are well primed to approach the ‘inextricable entanglements’ of the environment, society, subjectivity and our own actions (Neimanis *et al.* 2015: 68). Our singular meaning system of care and performance compels us forward.

Notes

- 1 For an introduction to the international collaborators, see www.oise.utoronto.ca/dr/Research_Projects/Youth_Theatre_Radical_Hope_and_the_Ethical_Imaginary/index.html (accessed 14/02/19).
- 2 See Project: Humanity website at www.projecthumanity.ca/towards-youth (accessed 09/03/19).
- 3 To date, that piece has enjoyed a development process in Banff, Alberta, at a playwrights’ colony where Kushnir and Gallagher spent a week in May 2017. Subsequently, Crow’s Theatre, a professional theatre in Toronto, supported a two-week development process in December 2017, culminating in two public readings of the script. Now, a full production of the play, its world première, co-produced with Kushnir’s company Project: Humanity (see www.projecthumanity.ca/towards-youth, accessed 09/03/19), took place at Crow’s Theatre in March 2019 (see www.crowstheatre.com/whats-on/view-all/towards-youth-a-play-on-radical-hope, accessed 09/03/19).
- 4 All youth names used are pseudonyms.
- 5 Turner-King’s research team included two PhD students: Emily Temple, who worked as an assistant ethnographer and Hanzhi Ruan, whose role was to document the process using photography, audio and video recording.
- 6 The Belgrade’s community and education team has a commitment to ‘building confident, articulate young citizens with an active interest in the world around them’. For more information, see <http://belgrade.co.uk/take-part/youth-theatre> (accessed 21/03/19).
- 7 In a UK context, ‘youth services’ is an umbrella term for the plethora of systems, organisations and initiatives that serve young people, supporting their physical, emotional, social and cultural welfare. Youth services are provided by both voluntary and statutory sectors.
- 8 See www.change.org/p/coventry-city-council-stop-coventry-youth-centres-from-being-closed-down-and-turned-into-family-hubs (accessed 16/10/18).
- 9 For further detail about the new research project, please see www.oise.utoronto.ca/dr/global-youth-digital-citizen-artists.