CONSCIENTISING CULTURAL PERFORMANCE : THEATRE-MAKING AMONGST EVENT-SPECIFIC POPULAR AUDIENCES

by Gerard Boland (Australia)

Abstract

The late Paulo Freire's ideas about conscientisation (*conscientização*) represent an innovation in educational practice that has much to say to practitioners of educational drama. This is especially the case for those who, through process drama, attempt to reorder power relations between educators and educands via adroit use of diverse role conventions in order to facilitate different modalities of critical dialogue. But is learning and teaching concerned with theatre production as straightforward and unproblematic as the technical literature concerned with mainstream theatre production would suggest? This discussion proposes that one of the ways in which we can better understand — and continually renew — the theory and practice of theatre and drama in education is to make stronger efforts to connect it with other significant educational innovations of our era. The paper examines how Freire's ideas about conscientisation could help to redefine the ways in which pre-professional adult theatre-makers might engage the well-known phases of theatre production when the project at hand concerns the creation of original entertainments for event-specific popular audiences.

Extrait

Les idées du défunt Paulo Freire à propos de la conscientisation (*conscientização*) représentent une innovation en termes de pratique éducative qui offre beaucoup aux pratiquants de l'art dramatique éducatif. Cela est tout particulièrement le cas pour ceux qui, par l'intermédiaire du procédé d'art dramatique, essaient de réordonner les relations de pouvoir entre les éducateurs et les éduqués par l'utilisation adroite de diverses conventions de rôle dans le but de faciliter des modalités différentes de dialogue critique. Mais l'apprentissage et l'enseignement se soucient-ils de la production théâtrale comme étant aussi directe et sans problème que la littérature technique traitant de la production théâtrale grand public semble indiquer ? Cette discussion propose que l'une des manières avec laquelle nous pouvons mieux comprendre – et constamment renouveler – la théorie et la pratique du théâtre et de l'art dramatique dans l'éducation est de faire de plus grands efforts pour le connecter avec d'autres innovations éducatives significatives de notre époque. L'article examine la façon dont les idées de Freire sur la conscientisation pourraient aider à redéfinir les manières avec lesquelles les producteurs de théâtre adultes pré professionnels pourraient engager les phases bien connues de production théâtrale quand le projet en vue traite de la création de spectacles originaux pour des audiences populaires d'événements spécifiques.

Resumen

Las ideas del finado Paulo Freire acerca de la concientisación (*conscientização*) representan una innovación en la práctica educativa que tiene mucho que decir a los profesionales del drama educativo. Este es especialmente el caso para los que, mediante el drama del proceso, intentan reordenar las relaciones de poder entre los educadores y educandos por medio del uso hábil de las convenciones instituidas para facilitar diferentes modalidades del diálogo crítico. ¿Pero se encuentra el aprendizaje y la enseñanza interesada con la producción de teatros en forma directa y libre de problemas tal como la literatura técnica sugiere que se encuentra interesada con las obras de teatros principales? Esta discusión propone que una de las maneras en las cuales podemos comprender mejor, renovar continuamente, la teoría y la práctica del teatro y el drama en la educación es el de realizar mayores esfuerzos para enlazarlo con otras innovaciones educativas significativas de nuestra década. El documento examina como las ideas de Freire acerca de la concientisación podrían ayudar a redefinir las maneras en las cuales los adultos pre-profesionales elaboradores del teatro quizá apliquen las fases conocidas de las obras de teatros cuando el proyecto que se tiene trata sobre la creación de entretenimientos originales para las audiencias populares específicas de eventos.

Author's biography

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In Paulo Freire's view, an authentic act of knowing describes 'a dialectical movement which goes from action to reflection and from reflection upon action to new action' (Freire 1972a: 31; 1985b: 50). This concept forms the very core of Freire's praxis philosophy:

> For the learner to know what he did not know before, he must engage in an authentic process of abstraction by means of which he can reflect on the action- object whole, or, more generally, on forms of orientation in the world. (Freire 1972a: 31; 1985b: 50–51)

The aim of this dialectic is: 'Authentic liberation — the process of humanisation … Liberation is a praxis: the action and reflection of men and women upon their world in order to transform it.' (Freire 1994b: 60) The means for realising this transformative aim are grounded in 'problem-posing education' and 'dialogical relations' (1994b: 60), wherein:

> The teacher is no longer merely the-one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow … (Freire 1994: 61)

The consequences of my espousal of this value/means for the promotion of critical learning and teaching, and the ways in which I applied Freire's propositions for problem-posing education to the creation of original entertainments for performance amongst event-specific popular audiences, worked to shape the character of my interactions with pre-professional adult learners during seven years of experimentation and innovation concerned with our creation of street theatre, parade performance and cabaret for a national motor sports race that occurs annually in Bathurst, New South Wales, Australia.
The Bathurst 1000 is Australia's equivalent of the US Indianapolis 500. But it is not held in an arena where the track is wholly visible to the spectators. It is held on a 6 kilometre circuit that ascends, traverses and descends Mount Panorama, and is considered to be the premier racing event in the Australian motor sports calendar for Super V8 teams.

In 1989, the lecturing staff of the BA in Communication (Theatre/Media) at Charles Sturt University were approached by the producers of the Bathurst 1000 Festival with a request to provide a variety of entertainments for their street party. The corporate sponsors of the Bathurst 1000 proposed this new festival in order to facilitate a variety of community-oriented events for the benefit of the diverse stakeholder groups as they mingled in the downtown precincts of the Bathurst central business district. It would be held throughout the duration of race week, culminating on the Saturday night prior to the annual running of the race on the Sunday of the Labour Day long weekend in early October.

Our specific brief, as CYCLE Productions, was to 'enhance the carnivalesque atmosphere and celebratory character' of a number of the civic festivities connected with Bathurst 1000 Festival. We accepted this offer with alacrity.

Contextual circumstances of the theatre-making

CYCLE Productions Bathurst 1000 Festival Project presented staff and students of the BA Communication (Theatre/Media) with a very significant opportunity to consolidate prior learning by using it to develop new, more critical, understandings concerning the creation of original entertainments for thematically focused, site-specific cultural performance events. This was a formidable task — one that can be summarised in the following way:

- The festival organisers expected *multiple performances, by multiple companies, in multiple sites* , wherein each small company needed to realise a standard of performance equal to the expectations and interests of their audiences for humorous, peculiar entertainments, and whimsical diversions of a celebratory nature.

- The *festival organisers had professional expectations* for the entertainments to be presented; even though the theatre-makers were all *pre* -professional. Consequentially, the theatre-makers were learning the skills of their production roles while at the same time attempting to actualise those production behaviours with the competence and grace of experienced professionals.
- The *timeframe for production was accelerated* . The full sequence of the production cycle was short (never more than 12 weeks), ranging from late July to the end of the first week in October. It was short because everyone who worked on CYCLE Productions' Bathurst 1000 Festival Project did so on a part-time basis, while managing his or her full-time engagement with three other concurrent units of undergraduate study. This part-time participation included the lecturer/directors as well, as they balanced their leadership roles with other teaching, administrative and family commitments.

And, significantly:

- There were *no scripts with which to begin the production cycle* . Hence there were never any 'in-built' clues about the characters, the words they would speak, or the contextual framings for dramatic action with which to begin rehearsals and from which to propose the design concepts for props, costumes and site decoration.

One of the great ironies about this whole project is that I began the undertaking with very little interest in motor sport and even less knowledge about it. Yet, over the ensuing years, I came to know rather more than I ever expected to know — or wanted to know — about Australian motor sport and about car culture in general. I also came to learn a great deal about the character of the people who comprise the very special communities of interest and communities of location (Kershaw 1992: 30–31) that camp on top of Mount Panorama. Together with the successive cohorts of theatre-makers, I absorbed a great deal of information through the local and national media about the drivers and their support teams who work in 'the pits'. We also learned a great deal about the event-specific interests and social habits of the 25 000 enthusiasts who camp on top of 'Mount Pan', and the additional 35 000 who arrive for the day of the race, some of whom arrive in chartered planes, stay in the finest accommodation and enjoy the sumptuous hospitality of the corporate tents at prime viewing locations along the race circuit. And then there are the local mercantile supporters of the race, the thousands of local families who enjoy the festivities, and the many hundreds of individual Bathurst residents who choose to flee the invasion of their city during race week.

Each of these groups has different thematic interests and characteristic patterns of behaviour while resident in Bathurst for the running of the race. My responsibility, in my dual role as both educator and director, was to develop a new approach to the creation of entertainments for these diverse communities of interest and location within the event-specific context of the Bathurst 1000 Festival. I say new approach because there were no books on the subject with which I was familiar. There were books and articles that described diverse projects which created original entertainments, but none of these publications spelled out the processual differences between theatre productions that begin with the benefit of a script and those which must generate event-specific characters and scenarios for dramatic action which take their inspiration from an understanding of the interests and concerns of the audience
(s) themselves.

'Brides of Brock' with racing legend Peter Brock / Photo: Gerard Boland (1995)

In asserting that we needed a 'new approach', I am not meaning to suggest that mainstream theatre was the only type of theatre practice that could provide a model for our theatre-making. Certainly there were a range of texts and exemplars of practice that could provide some inspiration to our theatre-making efforts. But I am suggesting that the production practices of scripted mainstream theatre overwhelmingly influenced the ways in which our undergraduate theatre-makers conceptualised the normative processes of theatre production and how they located themselves within that social formation for cultural production.

By contrast, in 1989, at the start of the project, our principal inspiration was drawn from the work of Welfare State International, as described in Tony Coult and Baz Kershaw's (1983) *Engineers of the Imagination: The Welfare State Handbook*. Their approach to mobilising community-based theatre was also understood through projects undertaken, in my case, with Welfare State's John Fox and Sue Gill in Australia during 1978; and, in the case of my colleague Bill Blaikie, during a 1988 summer workshop conducted by Welfare State International in the United Kingdom. We were both keen to apply their

methodological insights and fabrication techniques to the challenges embedded within our event-specific project of theatre-making for popular audiences at Australia's most famous — if not its most notorious — motor sports event.

Engineers of the Imagination was the prescribed text for the unit of study that made our participation in the Bathurst 1000 Festival possible. But it must be understood that this particular unit of study was not meant to support a survey of the literature on alternative theatre. It was called 'Performance Workshop' and it was designed to provide the 'pedagogical space' (Freire 1996: 172) within the curriculum of the three-year degree program for second-year undergraduates to work with their entire cohort on a lecturer- directed project. This narrative describes how we developed that project. It is not written with the intention of discussing the work of other practitioners in the area of devised or workshopped theatre, nor does it attempt to locate this project within avant-garde or political theatre projects that characterised alternative theatre practices and innovations during the twentieth century. This unit of study was focused on making original theatre, and we didn't have time to use it as a basis for reading about theatre history or to survey a range of performance practices.

But I must acknowledge one further influence that was imbricated throughout all aspects of the project. Both the principal lecturer/directors associated with this project had, at different times during the early 1980s, studied physical theatre at the Dell'Arte School of Mime & Comedy in Blue Lake, California. So physical comedy, the use of masks, puppets, circus and all manner of movement theatre also provided a point of reference for Bill Blaikie and myself as we worked with the participating theatre-makers. Yet, while we were influenced by Welfare State International and our actor training in physical theatre, we were also both in full accord with the educational propositions for learning and teaching made by Paulo Freire. As such, we knew that we had to inaugurate and sustain the production process through dialogue with the participating theatre-makers. This is how we started the process.

We used our common sense when we came together to inquire into the thematic interests of the groups that exist within Australian motor sport generally, and those that are present within the particularity of the phenomenon of race week in Bathurst. It was clear to us that some spectator groups existed as a consequence of their particular interests in motor sports as fans, and some as a result of their specific social and/or specialised professional roles within the organisation of the race meeting. Others simply lived in Bathurst and had particular attitudes and characteristic behavioural responses to this annual event that swamped their city with visitors.

These groups were easily discernible, and we could make inquiries *about* them, and talk *with* them, as part of our dramaturgical research strategies to more authentically portray them within our dramatic fictions. The performative consequence of this research effort was that these communities of interest and communities of location showed up as representational characters in a theatre of situation (Fo 1985) that enabled their community identifications to be established in the mind of the audience. Within the dramatic action of our street theatre, parade performance and the Mountain Madness Cabaret, this was achieved through codifying conventions such as costume and choice of props, as well as through the use of well-known profane and coarse language that characterises many of these groups of race enthusiasts.

My challenge lay in the need to engender a spirit of critical, transformative thinking amongst individual theatre-makers and an optimistic, ensemble *esprit de corps* that would enable them to transcend their fears and uncertainties about generating original theatre for performance amongst these specialised target audiences. They needed to enlarge their skills and capacity to create original work that was based upon diverse dramaturgical research strategies for investigating the themes and interests of the audiences who would participate in their street theatre, parade and cabaret performances.

Conscientização, as an educational project of investigation, thematisation, problematisation and cultural intervention (Freire 1994b: 77–105; Collins 1977: 83), thus became a value/means for theatre-makers engaged in CYCLE Productions' Bathurst 1000 Festival Project to develop their creative capacity to think and act in more critical ways — that is, to 'emerge' from naïve thinking into more critical forms of reflection and social discourse so that these reflections led each one to 'intervene' — in association with others — within the specificity of their own existential circumstances, by taking action to transform the conditions and circumstances that shaped the experience of their own theatre-making efforts. In doing so, they needed to reframe their understanding of their own role in relation to the coordinating lecturer/director, their relation to one another and, significantly, their relationship with their audiences:

> Education must begin with the solution of the teacher–student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously teachers *and* students … Whereas banking education anaesthetises and inhibits creative power, problem-posing education involves a constant unveiling of reality. (Freire 1994b: 53, 62)

To achieve this, the majority of the participant theatre-makers would have to refashion their ideas about theatre-making processes in ways that would cause them to abandon their erstwhile dependency upon a

lecturer/director and embrace their own responsibility to create scenarios for dramatic action while negotiating the conceptual dislocations and discontinuities that were inevitably occasioned by the blurring of boundary distinctions between playwright, directors, actors and technical production crew.

During these initial interactions with the company members, I needed to think very carefully about how I — in my leadership position as the coordinating lecturer/director — used language, so that my communication initiatives all worked to:

- disassemble and reorder the expectations that the student/theatre-makers had about *my role* and
- *their roles* within the context of our theatre production project; and
- encourage them to exercise creative agency in refashioning their dramaturgical research strategies as theatre-makers.

Early in my career as a lecturer in drama in education and theatre studies, I had begun to consider the similarities between Freire's account of his methodological innovations in adult literacy and the characteristics of what I can only describe as a type of 'arts illiteracy' which I often observed amongst many of the pre-professional adult learners who participated in the classes that I taught. What I mean by this is that their prior learning and prior experience in theatre production usually meant that they had studied methods and practices that were primarily — if not solely — concerned with the analysis of scripts and the interpretation of those scripts as dramatic action on a stage, within an indoor performance venue, that offered the maximum capacity to control lighting, sound and the activity of the audience.

I noticed that young adults whose theatre experience was largely limited to mainstream theatre production did not have a working vocabulary for describing and guiding their labours if the project at hand was to create original entertainments for theme and/or site-specific cultural performance events. In Freire's terms, they did not have a vocabulary for 'naming the world' because they had not yet developed a critical — and therefore transformational — stance in relation to either their own studies, or to the cultural action dimension of their theatre-making initiatives. Moreover, they seemed to be largely oblivious to the ways in which the culture code of mainstream theatre is authoritarian and elitist. What do I mean by this?

In my view, the efficacy of the theatre-makers' undergraduate experience rested, to a considerable extent, upon the degree to which our curriculum could propose relevant research challenges, facilitate critical dialogue about their reading, and engage theatre-making experiences which would prepare them for the professional arts/education milieu to which they wished to gain access. These educational aims needed to be accomplished while, at the same time, nurturing their capacity to think and act from an ethical and critical point of view. Such a point of view understands that the 'commodification of cultural consumption' (Kershaw 1999: 37) and the aesthetics and the technical processes of mainstream theatre performance are based upon an:

> instrumental/technical rationality [that] is more interested in method and efficiency than in purpose. It delimits its questions to 'how to' instead of 'why should' (Kincheloe and McLaren 2003: 438).

Because I work in a higher education environment that emphasises learning through a critical praxis of action and reflection, my concerns as an educator must focus on issues that include both the 'how to' *and* the 'why should' dimensions of learning and teaching about theatre production.

This notion neatly expresses the 'double dialectic' (Carr and Kemmis 1986: 184) of theory and practice — of growing and testing knowledge through theatre-making as a 'production praxis'. This orientation stands in marked contrast to the empty 'verbalism' (Freire 1994b: 68) of intellectual discourses that merely critique and theorise about performance texts and events without grounding knowledge in an authentic praxis of theatre-making.

In the area of theatre arts practice, the problem with the aesthetic and technical *habitus* and *dispositions* (Thwaites, Davis and Mules 1994: 187; Bourdieu 1984) of mainstream 'theatrical performance' (Carlson 1996: 196–99) is that it has the capacity to divert erstwhile innovative people into discounting or mistrusting their creative capacity to invent new ways of carrying forward their theatre-making ideas into performance amongst popular audiences.

For theatre-makers who are intent on creating original entertainments for event-specific popular audiences, the types of assumptions attached to the culture code of mainstream theatre represent a kind of false consciousness. This is because these assumptions work to naturalise expectations, on the part of production personnel, about power relations within a hierarchical social organisation that emphasises stratified lines of authority. These define boundaries for the expression of theatre-making agency that do not match the circumstances dictated by the specificity of theatre-making for event-specific popular audiences.

This altered circumstance is instantly comprehended when we recognise the simple fact that we could not use a pre-existing script as the basis for our production process. Yet most of the commonly used handbooks for theatre production (McCaffery 1988: 9; Griffiths 1982: 10–11; Stern 1995: 17) routinely assume the pre-existence of a script as *the* starting point for all production decisions. For the director and others, it is the unspoken starting point for all discussion concerning the team's approach to

production planning.

One can consult any number of well-known publications concerned with theatre production and notice that they will present an organisational chart that depicts such lines of authority — usually with the producer or the general manager and the artistic director at the apex (McCaffery 1988: 13; Stern 1995: 50; Hawkins and Menear 1988). These publications, and others like them, demonstrate how contemporary models for mainstream theatre production consciously embrace command structures of industrial organisation and replicate — perhaps unconsciously — many of the operational values derived from departmentalised lines of authority and subordination as hierarchies of decision-makers, not unlike a military 'chain of command'.

The problem is that the highly stratified organisational structure which operates in mainstream theatre erases the opportunity for actors to become designers and makers of costumes and props, or for designers and fabricators to perform. It assumes that a script already exists. 'During the readings, rehearsals, and production, you must have a copy of the script and a thorough understanding of it,' counsels Lawrence Stern (1995: 17). Yet nowhere in Stern's excellent handbook of stage management will you find a reference to the role of the playwright in rehearsal, or the activity of actors as script editors, or how to brainstorm ideas about developing new approaches to dramaturgical research that will produce resonant scenarios for dramatic action, or proposals for costumes, or event-situated parade floats. But you will find commentary on the role and functions of key production personnel. For instance: 'The *director* is to interpret the script through the use of actors and designers.' (Stern 1995: 51)

Viewed in this light, the organisational *habitus* and *dispositions* of mainstream theatre production pose a threat to the efficacy of the Freirean value/means of *conscientização* which are oriented around interactive forms of co-intentional decision-making and democratised problem-posing dialogue. As such, we quickly recognised that this type of organisation — and the culture code of dominance and submission that it represents — was ill-suited to the educational character of CYCLE Productions' Bathurst 1000 Festival Project. Moreover, our lack of a pre-existing script meant that we needed to maximise our capacity to come up with ideas that would resonate with our audience. In consideration of these factors we realised that, first, we *all* had to become contributors to the creation of scenarios for dramatic action and, second, because time was short, we all had to become fabricators or costumes, props, and the parade floats.

'Motor World Queen' 1989 Festival Parade / Photo: Peter Brady

Yet, within the culture code of mainstream theatre production, the actor is often cast as having the narrowest dimension of creative agency in terms of power, within the context of the company, to effect any influence on the art design or the social/political message of the production. This is clear to 'theatrical performance' insiders (Carlson 1996: 196–99), even though the audience might imagine that the actors enjoy the largest measure of artistic freedom. Consider the following characterisation of the actor's role in production: 'The *actor* is to deliver the playwright's words, emotions, actions, and characterisations, as interpreted by the director, to the audience.' (Stern 1995: 51)

Stern's essentialist rendering of the actors' task focus does not take into account the possibility that the actors could also simultaneously cooperate with others to become joint playwrights *and* collaborate with the director(s) and designer(s) to jointly create original imagistic staging and props and dramatic scenarios for performance amongst festival audiences.

What this reveals is a quality of acritical muteness, within the discourses of technical literature

concerning theatre production, on the question of status and power relationships amongst theatre workers.

My point is that the *habitus* and the normative operational *dispositions* embedded in the culture code of mainstream theatrical performance represent a potentially 'oppressive reality' (Freire 1994b: 33) which is ill-suited to production efforts that do not have the benefit of a pre-existing script. The mindset that it promotes deforms the theatre-maker's sense of personal agency and creative freedom when this culture code is inappropriately operationalised within projects that require personal initiative, interpersonal cooperation and a new type of dramaturgy to create original entertainments that can resonate with event-specific popular audiences. For I am specifically referring to the creation of event-specific entertainments for popular audiences whose primary thematic interests revolve around motor sport, drinking alcohol and the camaraderie that those pursuits entail.

The problem that I posed to successive cohorts of theatre-makers revolved around our need to create resonant entertainments for the diverse audiences toward whom — and for whom — our artistic labours were directed. My communication initiatives and interactions with the theatre-makers were designed to encourage and facilitate their willingness to: a) identify the skills they already had and those that they wished to develop; b) brainstorm what they already knew about Australian motor sports and then to verbalise the gaps in their knowledge in terms of their understanding of the lived experience of race week in Bathurst; and then c) to speculate about the 'risks' that they would need to take in terms of rethinking their role within the generative process of creating original entertainments and not waiting for someone else to produce a script for them to interpret. In a sense, we were modelling the challenge that confronted us and were speculating on the 'what', 'how' and 'why' dimensions of the response we would make to achieve our learning aims and theatre-making objectives.

The tension between the aims of the educational project and the existential conditions that shaped it called for a response on my part, in my leadership role as lecturer/director, to ensure that dialogue with - and amongst — the theatre-makers succeeded in facilitating their opportunity to verbalise their levels of awareness about the communities of interest and communities of location toward which we addressed our efforts. This particular concern shaped the first order of business in terms of our production process. Thus the dialogical investigation of *their* themes and *their* aspirations was critical to what would follow because it reflected their 'situation', their 'view of the world'. Our performances in the streets and pubs of Bathurst had to connect with the 'thought–language–context' (Freire 1998: 141) of the motor sports enthusiasts. As such, the contextual realities of our performance(s) as a form of cultural intervention had much more to do with the creation of characters that represented the people in the audiences themselves, and placing those representational characters in clearly localised, event-specific social landscapes that were immediately identifiable to the audience.

By identifying and discussing the conceptual and experiential boundaries that reflected their 'situation in the world', we were able to engage in dialogue in order to define an agenda for action that matched our particular 'situation' and 'view of the world' in terms of the project in which we were engaged. This position is consistent with Freire's assertion that 'the interrelation of the awareness of aim and of process is the basis for planning action — which implies methods, objectives and value options' (1972a: 22).

Part of the journey of transformation that CYCLE Productions' youthful theatre-makers needed make typically concerned:

- agreeing to suspend their negative impressions of race enthusiasts and make authentic dramaturgical research efforts to investigate the themes and interests that animate the constituent communities of interest and communities of location which comprise the stakeholder groups associated with the Bathurst 1000; and
- embracing the notion that one could replace feelings of fear and pity — born of prejudice and ignorance — with authentic curiosity and sympathetic fellow-feeling that is initiated and sustained through a willingness to make honest and open-minded inquiries to discover more about the culture of motor sports through dialogue with each other about the informational artefacts of that culture and dialogue with people who are living exemplars of the interests and the passions that characterise the different stakeholder groups associated with the Bathurst 1000 race.

This *transformative experience* is different from other types of theatre-making because it requires the theatre-makers, in Freire's words, to 'really experience their own Easter' and 'die as elitists so as to be resurrected on the side of the oppressed' (1973b: 2). 'Conversion to the people requires a profound rebirth.' (1994b: 43)

So their 'rebirth' concerned the reformation of their ideas about the role of performers within the production process and their capacity to define their own strategies for dramaturgical research. These shifts in their thinking about theatre production would be reflected in the actions they took to prepare themselves for performance in-role as 'representational characters' in a 'theatre of situation' (Fo 1985) who actively sought to promote the robust and unpredictable types of interaction that can take place when the two-way convention of direct address is engaged with event-specific audiences on the streets of Bathurst.

'Chassis': A Car Parts Band / Photo: Gerard Boland (1996)

This need to 'die as elitists' represents a tremendously important shift in the ways in which the theatre-makers needed to think about — and conduct dramaturgical research into — their audience in order to enable them to perceive the world from the event-specific point of view of their intended audience(s). Why? Because popular audiences, such as motor sport enthusiasts:

> demand more moment-by-moment effect from their entertainers. If an act is not good enough they let it be known, and if it's boring they chat amongst themselves until it gets less boring, or they leave, or they throw things. (McGrath 1981: 57)

The students' conscientisation lies in the degree to which they were willing to be midwives to their own rebirth as theatre-makers. They needed to create what Kershaw (1992: 26–27, 257) calls 'authenticating conventions'. These are embedded within the actions of representational characters in ways that 'enable an audience to perceive the specific ideological meanings of the show in relatively explicit ways' (Kershaw 1992: 26).

We 'reinvented' and 'rewrote' the process that Freire describes in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in the sense that we *investigated* our own assumptions about theatre production practices and we dialogued together to discover the boundaries of our awareness of the culture of Race Week in Bathurst. This

revealed certain 'limit situations' in response to which we identified the sorts of limit acts (Freire 1994b: 80) that we could engage to ameliorate the limit situations.

Having made this type of dialogical investigation, we were able to perceive a variety of themes in terms of limit situations that concerned our organisation for production, as well as within the social phenomenon of race week as it is experienced by both residents and visitors to Bathurst. These limit situations were conceptual and behavioural. Their existence suggested an agenda for action in terms of how we could organise ourselves for production and how we might propose different types of redressive action that could be depicted through the entertainments that we devised. So our early dialogues concerned the identification of an agenda for dramaturgical research and through this effort the theatre-makers were acting to invent new approaches to theatre production processes while, at the same time, they were developing an ever-enlarging conceptual picture of the 'generative themes' (Freire 1994b: 78, 83–86) that were embedded within the cultural reality of race week in Bathurst.

Logo for 1992 Mountain Madness Cabaret / Design: Mike Finch

It was this methodology of thematic investigation that made it possible for our program of problem-posing education to identify significant dimensions of the contextual reality of the race week phenomenon to be externalised so that we could begin to 'recognise the interaction of the various components' (Freire 1994b: 85) of the social mix that defines Bathurst during race week. This enabled us to codify the interaction of the various components as representational characters, and to locate them in a fictional theatre of situation (Fo 1985) that could be recognised by diverse audience groups as speaking to their experience of race week in the streets of Bathurst.

This activity defines an epistemological stance on the part of the theatre-makers that caused them to inquire in a more critical way into the nature of the relationship between their own world view and the social themes that they discovered through their dramaturgical investigation — the 'reading' of the race week experience.

Their conscientising activity unfolded in proportion to the extent to which they were able to read this culture and codify its social themes in ways in which the members of the audience could recognise themselves within the representational characters and the fictional situations that those characters depicted. These entertainments were critical to the extent to which the theatre-makers were able to problematise the themes of these scenarios in ways that caused the audience to become actively engaged in the construction of meaning as the performance proceeded, so that there was a 'continuous negotiation of meaning between the performers and audience' (Kershaw 1992: 257) — one that challenged the audiences' sense of identity without alienating them in ways that would have them chatting loudly amongst themselves, leaving or throwing things.

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