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Transforming with Organisations: Play and Playmaking in Participatory Enquiry.

Leny Woolsey
University of Auckland

Abstract

This paper challenges the view of transformation in organisations as a discrete activity with pre-determinable outcomes. Instead, drawing from the dramaturgical perspective, it is suggested transformation, including organisational development, might be better understood as an ongoing series of open-ended dialogic performances filled with ambiguity. Using a selection of ethnodramatic data generated in a collaborative research partnership with a supplier to the New Zealand construction trade, this paper offers a new participatory methodology, organisational playmaking, for both researching and enacting organisational transformation. It responds to calls for empirical research into the "how" of development by drawing out connections between theatre, organisational research and the associated aesthetic pedagogy of play, including links to flow, framing and "communitas". In particular it pays attention to how the identities and intentionalities of all those involved in organisational transformation - including external parties acting as "developers" - are multiple, partial, transient and subjective. In so doing, it claims all participants engaged in such methods must be willing to contribute to and be changed by the collectively constructed performances of organisational transformation.

Keywords: Theatre, Play, Leadership Development

Transforming with Organisations: Play and Playmaking in Participatory Enquiry.

SCENE 1: COMPLICITY

The sun glimmers through tall trees in the bush, west of Auckland. The sea can be heard beyond birdsong and a light rustling of the wind. Inside a round, canvas yurt music is playing. 13 participants sit in a circle, casually dressed. There is an excited hubbub and occasional chuckles as they look at each other, fidgeting, chatting, pointing out things in the space. A researcher/developer, LENY, fades the music out. There is a hush as people turn to look at her.

LENY: *(sitting)* Thank you everyone for being here. Let's just take a minute to look around.... look who else is here. And maybe just check in with what you know about them. *(She looks down at her notes)*

MARGARET, who has been occupied with her phone looks up and stares coldly at LENY. Group members exchange quizzical glances in silence. They begin to make faces and snigger. The giggling builds and MIKE erupts with laughter, setting off others.

LENY: *(looking up in mock surprise)* Is that funny?
ADAM: I just look at Mike and laugh *(most of the group is laughing now).*
MIKE: *(laughing and shouting back across the circle)* Right back at you!

The laughing fades and people sit back in their chairs, visibly more relaxed.

LENY: As you know I'm writing a play to be performed at "lift-off" conference next year and I'm hoping by the end of these two days, we will have collectively come up with the material that will enable me to do that. But I'd like us to begin by talking about how we're going to play. I'd like us to create an environment where anything goes, where we can all say exactly what we want to say and where if any of us want to share something personal we feel safe in doing that. So, if I can just start with a suggestion, I wonder if we should have, as one of our *(she uses her hands to indicate quotation marks as she says)* "rules of engagement', *(ironically)* "what goes on at Bethell's Beach stays at Bethell's Beach". Does that sound ok?

People begin to smile at one another, complicit in the game. There are some titters from around the room and firm nods of heads.

LENY: I'm pretty sure there will be a lot of curious people in the office on Monday morning. So it's entirely up to you as a group, but my suggestion would be we keep the details to ourselves. Does that sound alright?
MARGARET: *(with a firm nod)* Yip.
LENY: *(pausing first to see if anyone else will jump in)* I have another suggestion for a "rule" as it were....

MIKE laughs loudly and buries his head in his chest to stifle it

LENY: ....which is that, over the next two days, if we want to talk about what's going on here, let's do that all together... Let's not go away and say "I didn't enjoy that bit" or "that was really cool" in little pockets. I think it would be healthier if we've got something to say, we all just bring it to the group. Does that make sense?

Firm nods again around the room and sounds of affirmation.

LENY: What else do you guys think?
MARGARET: *(with a wry smile and crossed arms)* It sounds like we need a safe word.

The whole group laugh and she grins, uncrossing her arms.

TERRY:*(cheekily)* What do you suggest, Margaret?

More laughter

LENY: Maybe you should explain in case anyone is not familiar...

More giggles

TERRY: When you need time out.
LENY: Yes, okay, because it might be uncomfortable. But the key to that as far as I'm concerned is that we don't offend anyone. We maintain respect for each other. *(To Margaret)* Do you honestly think we need a safe word?
MARGARET: No, I was joking *(she laughs and is joined by others)*.
LENY: Okay, shall we write these up on the board so we can check in later?

BEA jumps up and LENY hands her a whiteboard marker. BEA starts writing.

LENY: *(like others, scrutinising the list as it forms)* Is there anything else we need?
HENRY: Have fun?
LENY: Hmmm. I don't know. I think you either have fun or you don't. We probably shouldn't enforce fun...

Everyone laughs

BEA: *(pretending to write on the board)* No forcible fun!

Everyone laughs again

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During my actor training in Edinburgh I was influenced by the theatre company *Theatre de Complicité* (TdC) who staged productions at the "trendy" theatre in town, the *Traverse*. To my middle-class English self, their performances seemed radical, provocative, playful. TdC showed me that theatrical encounters by necessity involve not just on-stage performers but active audiences who are, themselves, performing. Fast forward nearly 20 years and this belief remains a core influence in my work as a researcher and facilitator of arts-based development. For me, all of life is dialogic performance. All inquiry is built around what knowledge "we" might playfully construct together, "in the moment" of performance. In any participatory endeavour, actors and audiences share risk and reward and are, thus, complicit in what is performed. This paper depicts one such endeavour where the collaborative writing of a play helped members of an organisation better understand and become integrated into its processes of change.

Scene 1- *Complicity* (the first two pages of this paper) - dramatises a form of complicity I have encountered in my research, albeit with a small "c". The script captures the opening

moments of a two-day workshop using theatre-based methods in leadership development. Appearing as the researcher-developer character LENY in the action, I playfully invite my co-performers into a relationship and learning space in which our paths and responsibilities are intertwined. As the dialogue weaves together, we become complicit around the goal of creating theatre. Months later, a 45 minute musical theatre production became the ultimate outcome of this workshop. It is not, however, that later performance I feature in this paper; rather, it is the participatory and playful nature of interactions in the performances of development.

In this paper I will introduce a new methodology I refer to as organisational playmaking, or playmaking for short. Playmaking stands apart from other theatre-based methods of development in two significant ways. First, it is participatory. Informed by the notion that the transformation of organisations is a participatory activity - one that takes place *with*, rather than *for* or *to* participants (Denzin, 2003) – playmaking extends work carried out in the field of applied theatre (AT), where theatre methods are now effectively used in both research and development contexts, often simultaneously (O'Connor & Anderson, 2013). Following an ontological steer from Goffman (1959, 1961, 1967, 1969) to conceive life as a series of socially constructed performances, playmaking requires that the researcher-developer figure (in this case, me) be complicit in their own transformation. Along with our co-participants, we contribute to and are changed by the collectively constructed performances of research and development. In its participatory nature, playmaking offers an alternative to the more commonly known "change technology', Organisational Theatre (OT). The latter has received critique for reductively "reinforcing power and status" (Clark & Mangham, 2004a, p.848) and being used "to promote the views of a particular group within an organisation" (Clark & Mangham, 2004b, p.37). Where the dialogue in OT is often constructed solely by independent theatre professionals, playmaking follows a tradition of performance ethnography, (Denzin, 2009) or ethnodrama, (Saldaña, 2011) in which the "scripts" are either fully or substantially "verbatim" (Anderson, 2015), having been recorded accurately from participant transcripts. The second methodological contribution of organisational playmaking is in the recognition of play as an aesthetic pedagogy. Whilst scholars have attended to the theoretical principles of play in arts-based organisational research (see Statler, Heracleous, & Jacobs, 2011), no empirical studies have yet looked at how aspects of play emerge in the theatre-based development space. This study zooms in on the playful dynamics between researcher-developers and participants and suggests that a deeper understanding of the aesthetic and pedagogic possibilities of play may carry significant potential in understanding the transformation of organisations.

Responding to the call for this special issue, and following the lead of Denzin (2009, 2011) and others pushing the boundaries of research presentation (Adler, 2015; Hansen, Barry, Boje, & Hatch, 2007; Kershaw, 2013), I will resist the traditional theory-method-findings-discussion format. Instead, I will use four ethnodramatic vignettes (Saldaña, 2003) to invite my reader more holistically into the research and to connect my arguments. The dialogue presented is verbatim and unabridged, transcribed from a video recording of the playmaking workshop. When analysing text from the vignettes I follow dramaturgical convention to describe the actions of the characters in the present tense, including myself in role as researcher-developer LENY. The remainder of this first section, following scene one, introduces the background to the empirical material and the basic principles of participatory methods. Scenes two and three contain some of the nuanced interactions from which I will develop my assertions. I will close the paper with some concluding remarks linked to the "denouement" of scene four.

Background

This research began as an investigation into the processes of OT. Specifically, I wanted to explore the potential for an approach that might challenge the critique that OT preserves rather than liberates from organisational power imbalances. Despite early enthusiasm for the technique within organisational aesthetics and development domains, it has been claimed that some OT programmes act as a form of coercive indoctrination (Clark & Mangham, 2004b) or identity regulation (Alvesson & Wilmott, 2002). Following a deficit logic where management are assumed to know what is "good for" subordinates, the aim of such work is to "change employees work behaviours" (Nissley, Taylor, & Houden, 2004, p.820). Taylor and Thellesen acknowledge the resultant tension in their provocatively named "*Tis Pity she's a Manager*, from the proceedings of the 2006 OT Summit hosted by Learning Lab Denmark, and ask:

> When you do theatre within a corporation you are offering up your powerful tools in the service – in the service of what? So perhaps the question is not whether one is a prostitute, but whether one is a mercenary. Although within the framework of our duality there may not be much difference – both sell themselves, the purity of the soldier being bound up in duty and service while the purity of the woman is bound up in love and virtue. Either way, the question remains, in the service of what? (Taylor & Thellesen, 2006, p.29)

Conscious of the inherent politics behind this question, I entered the research site in January 2016 intent on carrying out OT in a participatory fashion. My focus on a participatory, collaborative approach is evident in the line from Scene 1: *Complicity*:

> "...and I'm hoping by the end of these two days, we will have collectively come up with the material that will enable me to do that." – LENY, Complicity (Scene one)

Following entry, I became ethnographically immersed in Toolzone NZ, a pseudonym I gave to the local branch of a global supplier to the construction trade with approximately 80 employees nationwide. I was given a uniform, desk, laptop and email address, and was expected to attend training modules during my first few weeks in the company. As noted in my research journal, I was introduced as a new team member at the annual conference by GM Les McNeill. My research was directly linked to the "transformation" Toolzone was required to make:

> *He expresses his excitement about my project that uses theatre and tells people that in a year's time we will be watching a play about Toolzone. As he speaks, I stand glancing around the room, trying to gauge reactions. Most faces are blank.....He refers to a "transformation" the company needs to go through. "Cogs must turn to take Toolzone from being a $20 million company to a $30 million and $50 million company". He talks about "pain", "implosions" and announces "that's why Leny is here - to look at the stupid stuff we're doing". – Research journal, 3.2.16*

Les' front-stage performance at the conference does not allude to back-stage discussions that had already taken place during the negotiation of project scope. I had a pre-existing relationship with Les since I had encouraged him to pursue his Executive MBA a number of years prior and our natural rapport helped generate trust early in the research endeavour. I had asked him to make a "leap of faith" by entering into a partnership based around an untested method of "collaborative OT". Whereas most OT programmes, and the reports that document them, are structured around the performance event and follow up, I wanted to

explore the entire process from initial commission and negotiation through to the creative elements of crafting stories into performance with an organisation. Guided by a social constructionist ontology (Berger & Luckmann, 1967), I was careful not to guarantee any change or learning outcomes for Toolzone. At that stage I did now know who or what the project would serve. It was described as emergent research that might or might not entail a development process. For me, it was important that, like the design and content, the intentionality of the work would evolve collectively during participation in the research.

I commenced the fieldwork with a six month "framing" period that involved 35 face to face interviews, access to company documentation and extensive observation. In the following "scripting" phase, I facilitated a small-group workshop in which the play idea, characters and dialogue were developed based on the collective, theatre-based interpretation of initial data. The dialogue was then "treated" and refined into a dramatised script, with the support of a third-party dramaturg. In the third phase, "staging" the co-authored musical theatrical production *At What Cost* was cast, rehearsed, produced and performed using a team of professional actors. The final "reviewing" stage encompassed an immediate post-performance development workshop, a questionnaire and interviews. In the course of the 15 months of fieldwork every member of Toolzone NZ interacted with the research process in some way.

In this paper I focus on the small-group workshop that took place at the beginning of the "scripting" phase. This two-day workshop, similar to theatrical devising, had the objective of crafting stories, characters and dialogue that would be featured in a tailored theatre production, a piece of organisational theatre. It was influenced by the theatre practices of Augusto Boal (1989), Keith Johnstone (1999), Clive Barker (2010) and Joe Norris (2009). *Complicity* documents the opening moments. The scene positions the researcher-developer character LENY as integral to the co-construction of the performances of the development space. Not immediately apparent from the standalone vignette, but featuring as part of the "back-stage" action in the "meta-play"(Prentki, 2012) of the research drama, is the fact that, by this point, I had already spent over six months embedded inside the organisation, alongside employees, part of the Toolzone "family". I had consciously and unconsciously played with various presentations of self, including expressions of ideology and intentionality. The resultant impressions or perceptions of my identity had been fluidly and playfully constructed over numerous interactions with participants. The drama unfolding in the workshop was, thus, already laden with expectations of how I would interact with other participants. I was insider and outsider, employee but not employee, researcher and developer. To some I was simply "that crazy theatre lady".

Participatory methods embrace ambiguity of identity and re-position research "subjects" as "actors" within an ensemble (O'Connor & Anderson, 2015). In order to create a sense of ensemble, and in line with the paradox of shared leadership (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003), *Complicity* shows how the character of researcher-developer LENY is required to instigate relational processes (Uhl-Bien, 2006) within the group, beginning with "how we're going to play". LENY presents herself as a co-actor in the dialogue, using the pronoun "we', inviting co-actors into the fictional frame of play and using questions to provoke ideas and imagination, rather than prescriptive instructions that are common in traditional facilitation. She deliberately positions herself "on the inside" – as part of the participant group and complicit in the activity. By necessity, however, her voice is heard more than others in the script: a developer must initially "lead" the construction of a democratic, participatory and dialogic learning environment, in order for a group to collectively take "ownership" and share the unfolding leadership of proceedings.

In this section I have introduced the research and begun to explore the idea of playmaking as a participatory methodology. I will return to moments from *Complicity* in later sections in

order to examine other dynamics at work. Next I will use other vignettes from the same workshop to look more closely at aspects of play that emerged between co-actors in this learning space.

SCENE 2a. PRESSURE TO PLAY

As before. Later the same morning. Chairs have been moved away.

MARGARET stands, arms folded at the edge of the space. Everyone else is in the middle playing a game of "stuck in the mud". BEA "tags" someone but then runs away thinking she has passed on the responsibility. The person tagged stands still legs apart, arms out, waiting for someone to crawl beneath their legs to release them (someone does). People yell at BEA that's she's still "it" and the whole space is alive with energy and laughter. BEA carries on chasing and trying to "tag" until LENY shouts out the name of another participant to take over. Panic sets in as people look around to see where the new chaser is. Play continues until LENY shouts out KYLE to be "it" and he quickly manages to tag everyone in the room. The movement stills and everyone laughs.

LENY: *(out of breath)* Awesome. Okay let's get back into a circle.

MARGARET rejoins the group as they form a ring.

LENY: Now here's another game. Pass the clap. We'll go in one direction, as fast as possible. And no skipping over people so it's about focus.... *(Starting on one side)* To you.

The clap is passed around. Now there is a determination in the group. People lean forwards, listening and watching closely as it flies around the circle. Where it falters, there is urgent, frustrated laughter, physical energy, and verbal interjections such as "keep it going". Most are still smiling and there is the odd muffled giggle. LENY says quietly, "faster". The rhythm smoothes and the speed increases. Giggling and shuffling intensify as people desperately try to sustain the flow of the clap before one person breaks the rhythm and the group erupts into laughter again.

LENY: Okay, let's come closer, holding hands.

There is another eruption of laughter as the group huddles tightly together, connected by a ring of hands. Some begin swinging their arms and bouncing around together, playing at being children. Most are visibly awkward, having never been in such close proximity before, many having never touched one another. They are unnaturally close but everyone is smiling.

LENY: This time let's do it with a pulse around the circle....

There is stillness, silence and many amused smiles. Settling, most people gaze intently at the centre of the circle. A few titters. Silence.

KYLE: *(suddenly and mock aggressively to his neighbour)* Don't pulse me, pulse him!

Everyone laughs and there are a few more hiccups before the group settles in to a steady rhythm and there is little motion or noise.

SCENE 2b. "THAT'S NOT THE STORY!"

A short time later. The group have just completed a "word-at-a-time story" small group exercise. They are giggling as they bring their chairs back into one big circle, from clusters around the room. As they re-assemble, LENY begins.

LENY: How was that? Is there anything else you'd like to add to "what makes a good story" now you've done that?
ADAM: It is easier to be in sync when there are less of you.
MARGARET: I found myself thinking ahead, and it wouldn't go where I was thinking it was going.

She laughs and the whole group joins her

LENY: So what happened?
MARGARET: Well somebody changed it. Like I would be thinking one thing, that the story was leading this way *(she uses her whole body and arms to show the flow of the story, looking at the whole group as she does it)* and somebody else would lead it that way *(indicating another direction)*.
LENY: And how did that make you feel?
MARGARET: *(loudly)* Frustrated! *(She laughs and the whole group laughs. She sits back in her chair and folds her arms smiling)* Like, "no no no, that's not the story!"

In this section and the next, I will try to emulate the theatre tradition of crafting a "well-made play" by finding both light and shade in my framing of play as an aesthetic pedagogy. First, a brief look at the connection between theatre, play and research. Theatre-based methods are particularly suited to participatory inquiry. They "collaboratively and artistically frame a "real" research problem or context in order to peer inside it" (Gallagher, 2011, p.328). Like other arts-based methods, they "gain access to lightness in the forms of intuitions, feelings, stories, improvisation, experience, imagination, active listening, awareness in the moment, novel words, and empathy" (Weick, 2007, p. 15). Arts-based research (ABR) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), including theatre-based enquiry, can address the nuances of situations and access fresh perspectives (Eisner, 2008). A researcher working with such methods can contribute to the enlargement of human understanding, be especially evocative and provocative, raise awareness and critical consciousness and promote dialogue through participation (Leavy, 2009).

The common thread binding all of these descriptors together is what I refer to as an "aesthetic pedagogy" of play. My terminology is deliberately chosen to reflect the tensions noted within the field of AT concerning whether art and theatre can or should be used for "instrumental" purposes (Brecht, 1964; Neelands, 2010; Schechner, 1988). Scholars in AT refer to the still dominant Aristotelian view of aesthetics that amounts to a conception of life as "raw" art as "cooked". They bemoan the commonplace perception of high art as "pure" – a "literary and private aesthetic" (Neelands, 1998, p.31) restricted to the middle class (Nicholson, 2005). Art and aesthetics, they argue, are traditionally placed in opposition to pedagogic instrumentality. The latter is seen as the domain of the worker in an organisation, or grass-roots community project, which privileges function and efficacy (Kershaw, 1992). This research suggests moving beyond such binary thinking and supports existing theory that aesthetic and pedagogic processes are two sides of the same coin (Neelands, 2009; White, 2015). Where there are aesthetic processes, there will inevitably be learning and change; where development occurs, there must be aesthetic experience.

In *Pressure to Play* there is a steady rhythm created by sustained periods of intense focus interspersed with spontaneous eruptions of laughter. Presence and humour weave together as two aspects of play in playmaking. Spontaneity, essential in play, can generate a profound learning experience (Mabey, 2013). Indeed, "the most meaningful insights often come by surprise and maybe even against the will of the creator" (McNiff, 2007, p.40). Playfulness is the antithesis of a "targets and outcomes culture" as it requires being engaged in the present moment, rather than being preoccupied with the result of an interaction (Jackson, 2007). This is most obvious when people are playing a physical game that involves every aspect of their being. They are completely absorbed in the current moment. When we become part of such an activity, our internal, socially conditioned, censorship stops. We yell at each other when things fall apart, as witnessed in *Pressure to Play* when BEA makes a "mistake" in tagging others and when KYLE explodes at his neighbour when the hand-pulse backfires. No one takes offence. It is only a game.

Players enacting another key application of playfulness - "make-believe" (Schechner, 1988) – also become absorbed in the activity, in an "autotelic" (Turner, 1979) state of "flow" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). Ego vanishes, attention is focused on a field of limited stimulus, and action and awareness are experienced simultaneously with no goal or hope of extrinsic reward. Actors on stage often appear to be engaged with the present moment when they "facilitate a productive interaction in the free, open creation of meaning" (Kupers, 2017, p.999). Being "in the moment" is an essential component of dramatic improvisation, glimpses of which appear in *Pressure to Play.* The suggestion "let's" is articulated repeatedly in the facilitation of the playmaking workshop. In other settings, this simple instruction acts as the foundation for a well-known improvisation exercise *"Yes let's"* in which every player must accept and build from their co-performer's suggestion. Such responsiveness corresponds to a form of facilitation noted by Sutherland and Ladkin in which the "moment-to-moment configuring and reconfiguring of action strategies to manage and encourage diverse viewpoints from many participants requires an agility of action beyond predetermined pedagogical plans and predetermined learning outcomes"(2013, p.122). While he or she is likely to have some loose structure based around the processes they wish to follow in a session, the developer adopting an aesthetic pedagogy of playful presence might, therefore, see themselves as a player who can accept and build from the suggestions of their fellow participants.

Acting as a foil to the intense awareness of the present moment is the release that comes from laughter. There are many such eruptions in the three scene excerpts *Complicity, Pressure to Play* and *That's not the Story.* I conceive these moments as glimmers of "communitas" described by Turner as collective lucidity, camaraderie and energy (1974), or the "direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities" (1982, p.47), and linked to a plural reflexivity. I recall feeling relief as the first laugh engulfed the group. To me, it was an indication that we were concentrated on the "here and now" rather than the "there and then". We had begun to create the kind of environment described by LENY in the first few lines of *Complicity.* We had collectively entered a kind of "liminal" space with an absence of status and structure (Turner, 1986). Bakhtin argues, with echoes of Brecht: "Laughter purifies from dogmatism, from the intolerant and the petrified; it liberates from fanaticism and pedantry, from fear and intimidation, from didacticism, naiveté and illusion, from the single meaning, the single level, from sentimentality" (1984, p.122).

Corresponding to the aesthetic category of the comic (Strati, 1999), laughter evokes a strong and instantaneous "felt sense". In the vignettes depicted so far, humour binds the group together. Repeated reference to playing and positioning within a "fun" frame serves to remind participants that this reality is "only a game', a fact that in turn allows actors to play the game with more commitment, and "poke" more fun at their daily lives. As Taylor observes, "If

you (the cast) don't have fun, the audience won't have fun. And if you're having fun, the audience will have fun" (2018, p.312). Findings from this research suggest Taylor's advice might be extended to the performances of the development context. An aesthetic pedagogy of play could involve developers deliberately giving off an expression of having fun as a kind of sign vehicle (Goffman, 1959) to generate a reciprocal sense within other participants. On reflection, the deliberate pregnant pause I left after uttering one of LENY's opening lines in the first scene - "maybe just check in with what you know about them" - likely stemmed from a vague intention to do something unusual, something these participants might find silly or bizarre. Indeed, the very fact we were in a yurt could be analysed as a playful act to generate surprise and bemused curiosity. While "communitas" can never be fully contrived, foolish, self-deprecating actions or surprising silliness might nurture the conditions required for collective sense-making to commence.

If "having fun" is infectious, might it also follow that other responses to discomfort, such as withdrawal or yielding, could be equally reciprocal? In *That's not the Story*, MARGARET grappled with a feeling of lost control. She got "Frustrated!" when the story deviated from where she wants it to go. Most of us, in at least some interactions, cling to a clear agenda of the action we believe to be best. A fictional frame (Goffman, 1986) can help create the aesthetic distance (Jackson, 2007) required to "see more" or "see differently" (Barry & Meisiek, 2010). It can provide the space to stand back, notice alternatives and cede control to the ensemble. In *That's not the Story*, the frame of a game allowed MARGARET to reflect and laugh at her own unwillingness to let go of control over a narrative, and process the disappointment of a spoiled storyline (Gabriel & Connell, 2010). Had she been engaged in a "truthful" collaborative construction, this may have been more difficult. An aesthetic pedagogy of play may, thus, be connected to embracing paradox, ambiguity and uncertainty in experience (Statler et al., 2011).

Uncertainty and humour are at odds with dominant management logics that privilege "serious" results-driven performance, such as the culture encountered in Toolzone. Despite moments of fun associated with uncertainty (Statler et al., 2011), the realities of dwelling in the unfolding process of an experience (Carroll, Levy, & Richmond, 2008), or placing "total attention on what is emerging and what could be emerging" (Ibbotson & Darso, 2008, p.558) can be uncomfortable. Most commissioners of development, arts-based or otherwise, are primarily concerned with outcome (Mabey, 2013) – the transformation they are hoping to generate. Such expectations "rub off" on participants, as evidenced by the prevalence of a "WIIFM" attitude in development programmes (standing for the question "what's in it for me?") In this study, whilst attendance was voluntary, a number of attendees at the workshop had to be convinced by the promise of company-funded alcohol and an extra day's leave to cover the out-of-hours time spent at the workshop.

Presumably mindful of such transactional demands for tangible outcomes, the literature around OT paints a compelling picture of the form as a "change technology" (Clark & Mangham, 2004b) that can "unfreeze" (Taylor, 2008) and, through second-order observation, elicit a "splitting experience" (Schreyogg, 2001) or catharsis (Meisiek, 2004). Hence, OT is seen principally as a managerial tool for skills training or more general organisational change, implying it is the outcome, not the process that matters. Along with other arts-based methods, studies have focused almost entirely on establishing what "impact" OT might have and how it "works". In this pursuit there has been little success. As Meisiek and Barry observe, "much of what is attributed to the arts remains at the level of lore, or it is presented in the form of generalizations which quickly peel apart and become useless for a scientific endeavour when subjected to tighter scrutiny" (2014, p.134).

This paper proposes that one of the most important aspects of play as an aesthetic pedagogy is playful attention to the present moment, rather than what it may lead to. Recognising the associated discomfort, it challenges the primacy of impact and outcome by supporting the suggestion that realities are always unfinished (Neelands, 2004). Organisations are in a perpetual state of "becoming'(Raelin, 2008) whereby transformation is a continuous process, rather than a shift from one fixed state to another. Whilst the possibility of "benefit" can be helpful in opening discussions with prospective host organisations, this research maintains that the focus of such conversations should be the potentialities of involvement in artistic processes, rather than working towards conclusive demonstrations of "impact" that can only ever be partial and transient. Rather than declaring the nature of the change an OT process might make, therefore, this study followed the tradition of applied theatre as research (ATAR) (O'Connor & Anderson, 2015) and treated elements drawn from an OT process as methods of inquiry. ATAR is "centrally concerned with dialogue, praxis, participatory exploration and transformation" (Cahill, 2006, p.62), involving a collaborative relationship between researcher/practitioner and participants and processes of collective enquiry, action and reflection (O'Connor & Anderson, 2015). It was this prospect of collectively generated knowledge and experience that became central to the work. Development outcomes were secondary and incidental to the research process, although the performance itself was later felt to have a lasting impact on the organisation.

This section has looked at ways in which presence, ambiguity and humour emerged as aspects of play in the research. An aesthetic pedagogy that combines such elements enables the moments of "communitas" witnessed in the vignettes. In a kind of virtuous circle, moments of spontaneity through communitas in turn enable participants to work with uncertainty and ambiguity. Play as a pedagogy also allows a researcher-developer, in partnership with an organisation, to venture beyond outcome-focused development work. In this case, framing the activity as an open-ended, arts-based research methodology with the potential for development "results" opened a door for Toolzone, as Taylor identifies:

> Artistic forms are for opening up many possibilities rather than forcing a specific outcome. Theatrical performance offers us a key for opening a door to organisational change, but we don't know where that door leads us (Taylor, 2008, p.405).

In the next section I will look at some darker aspects of play that featured in the aesthetic pedagogy of this research.

SCENE 3: WHERE THE BUCK STOPS

The same, a short time later. Small groups have presented Image Theatre scenes based on a phrase of data generated in the first round of interviews. Back in a circle, they are discussing the characters that have appeared in the fictional stories performed in order to select which characters should appear in the play about Toolzone. Adam lies on the floor in the middle capturing ideas and decisions on a large sheet of paper. They have discussed the "burning issue" of customer services and sales support (TS refers to a sales rep and CS to customer services). MARGARET has been relatively quiet for the preceding discussion. Suddenly, she raises her green marker pen aloft and interjects.

MARGARET: Can I just say, in this whole scenario, in this whole thing, there is one department nobody has thought of...

KYLE claps his hands and grins. Someone mischievously shouts out "Toolzone online?", presumably to wind MARGARET up.

LENY: Which is?

MARGARET: Finance, because where does the buck stop? It stops with finance, who has got to get the money out of *(leaning forward and shaking her pen at the sheet of paper summarising the characters)* THAT customer. Who we have pissed off. So where does the buck stop?

VICKI: So we should put finance in then.

BEA: A finance intern?

VICKI: No, I don't think a newbie finance. I reckon just finance.

ADAM: Where in the plays was finance? *(meaning the skits just performed)*

MARGARET: That's it! *(waving her pen around at everyone)* Everyone has forgotten through all this. Everything lands on finance. All the customer complaints, the collection of the money. You name it, it stops at finance. (*To everyone else)* You've all got a start, a middle, but no stop.

VICKI: Take it as a compliment that no one is like - *(suggesting blaming...)*

MARGARET: What makes you think finance have no issues? That's a load of shit.

LENY: Okay, why don't we make someone from the finance team the fourth character and then why don't we make either the TS or the CS a newbie?

ADAM: Yes, okay.

VICKI: I think TS as a newbie.

KYLE: Yes, I think that would create more scenarios. Because it goes CS, TS, Customer.

BEA: And finance. It goes CS, TS, Customer, Finance.

TIM: I think if you go customer service as the newbie, which fits more.... if you look at it as the issues we have at Toolzone-

MARGARET: Exactly!

TIM: It's more from the ingrained TS pushing back onto the customer service and the knowledge not being there and the processes not being followed.

ADAM: But experienced customer services still have... like that CS character *(indicating the participants who played it in the previous skit)* sums up or personifies what customer service –

TIM: But where are those new TS learning those habits from?

ADAM: Well it's all about getting set up, remember, like establishing-

VICKI: Yes!

MARGARET: *(waving her pen at Adam)* It's the inexperienced, untrained CS that causes the issues.

LENY: Not the inexperienced, untrained TS?

MARGARET: *(looking undecided and pausing)* Both?

TERRY: I think the CS is the point of contact for everything *(Margaret agreeing),* unfortunately. So without getting proper support, they do their best but, because they don't have the support, all the issues stem from that point.

MIKE: What I would like to table is that we actually cut the word customer service because I don't think it does justice to the job, at all, in any way, shape or form.

VICKI: Customer experience?

KYLE: Customer relationship manager?

MIKE: Relationship, blah blah.... But whatever the word is, sorry but "customer services" is like someone at a department store, standing behind a counter taking money. Zipping bloody bar codes. And that is not what our people do. *(To a customer service rep present at the workshop)* It is not what you do. You have to use your brain constantly, from the day you started to the time you finish, yeah? You have to think outside the square. You have to prioritise. You have to think about what the customer needs. There is a shit-load of stuff you need to do, and in my opinion you are not customer service.

STEFAN: That's not the purpose of this though, is it?
MIKE: I just wanted to put it on the table, though.
LENY: Okay, so we're going to have an opportunity in a minute to break into groups so that each of you gets to dig really deep into these different characters. So, let's do a vote. Who would like the newbie in these scenarios to be the CS role? *(show of hands)* That looks like a majority to me. So we'll do a CS newbie as our third character and that means that our TS has probably been around for a little while.
BEA: Like Tim.
TIM: Arrogant!

There comes a point when play becomes less fun. "Serious play" occurs when playful activities are fuelled by a "paradox of intentionality" in which practitioners deliberately adopt intrinsically motivated practices to achieve an extrinsic objective (Statler et al., 2011, p.237). Clarity is important here. An objective is not necessarily an outcome; it may be a process, as it was in the playmaking workshop. The group came together around a task to create stories, characters and dialogue for a play. The playmaking task was the objective for this group, not the change that the play may later effect. In *Where the Buck Stops* there is shift from immersive, autotelic play to intentional action, although the "rules" of the game haven't changed. Contributions are heard from a greater number of participants and LENY's voice is less dominant. Indeed, at one point, STEFAN steps into the role of co-facilitator by reminding MIKE of the task at hand. The participants seem to be edging close to the boundaries of the play frame. Theory suggests serious play involves more cognitive than embodied processes (Statler et al., 2011), a point supported by *Where the Buck Stops* in which participants communicate in a more static, considered and reflective way than the impromptu, gestural and embodied "banter" witnessed in earlier vignettes. Statler raises the issue of signalling in serious play by asking "how would [a researcher] know if participants had begun, or ceased, to play seriously?" (2011, p.241). MARGARET's suggestion of a "safe word" in *Complicity* could act as such a signal, to be used where a participant feels the stakes have been raised and the boundary of the play frame has been broken or stretched too far. In the event, the group decided not to adopt a safe word. It could, however, be an idea worthy of consideration where development goes beyond benign and "safe" practices by confronting and destabilising organisational norms and prejudices.

Rules are, therefore, important to protect the space and spontaneity of play. The related notion of signals in play links to the final aspects of play I wish to highlight as having emerged from my empirical study. Conflict is ever present in play, either subliminally on the fringes of the activity, or visible in play that is overtly competitive. In playmaking, conflict appears as dissensus, often stirred by deliberate contradiction or inversion. Dialogue from *Where the Buck Stops* shows waves of contradiction as participants argue their position around which characters should feature in the play. MARGARET kicks this off with her consternation that her department is, as yet, unrepresented in the playmaking activity. Others initially try to "stir the pot" but the group generally supports her idea, before revisiting the tensions around customer services. There is a sense that, now participants are absorbed in their own everyday realities, some of the playfulness is lost, for example in MIKE's empassioned speech beginning "Relationship, blah blah". It is almost as if, as Goffman notes, "on occasion we may not know whether it is play or the real thing that is occurring" (1986, p.7). We are still within the play frame as we enact a process of playmaking. We find ourselves once again, therefore, in a liminal space, betwixt and between two realities: the organisational setting that ties us all together and the collaborative performance of theatre-based research conducted in a yurt in the woods. In itself this may have been experienced as an unsettling contradiction. Just as the researcher-developer was both employee and not employee, other participants may have felt consciously or unconsciously torn between various, conflicting identities such as loyal organisational citizen, creative co-director,

independent researcher and myriad potential others. Whilst this article does not seek to pursue this particular line of questioning, enquiry into conceptions of roles and identities in participatory, theatre-based research may be a fruitful avenue for further research.

In an aesthetic pedagogy of play, inversion and contradiction are potentially productive, perhaps even essential to the learning process (Neelands, 2016). In leadership development (LD), contradiction is conceived as a form of constructive resistance along with humour (Gagnon & Collinson, 2017). Encouraging dissensus in play might then answer calls from within LD to build "resistance in the participants" voices and behaviour" (Nicholson & Carroll, 2013, p.1243). If so, such encouragement should be handled with some restraint to avoid a general slanging match. Rules are what help to balance the conflict and danger of play. They make play both pleasurable and frustrating (Neelands, 2016). They may even be a central feature in organising performance: "play is the improvisational imposition of order, a way of making order out of disorder" (Schechner, 1988, p.104). If we (as research co-participants and developers) wish to break the codes of silence and "surface undiscussibles" (Badham, Carter, Matula, Parker, & Nesbit, 2015), entering areas of "unmentionables" usually masked by convention, common sense and hegemony (Prentki, 2015b), clear rules should be established as signals and safety measures. Play in playmaking helps do exactly that. The dramatisation process provides the structure by which contradiction is both invited and managed. Alternative frames are applied over a primary framework of understanding (Goffman, 1986), which in this case is the reality of daily life at Toolzone. In playmaking the first lamination is the establishment of the game to be played – co-construction of a play. Additional, alternative frames are then suggested in the development of characters and stories. The group, with some guidance, develops a set of initial rules for how these would be handled – as seen in *Complicity.* At various points across the course of the two days these were revisited to check "compliance" and the need for any changes.
Despite attempts to play a lower profile once workshop dynamics are established, as co-participant rather than developer, in *Where the Buck Stops* LENY feels it necessary to interject with a quick "re-frame" on two occasions with the lines:

LENY: Okay, why don't we make someone from the finance team the fourth character and then why don't we make either the TS or the CS a newbie?
LENY: Okay, so we're going to have an opportunity in a minute to break into groups so that each of you gets to dig really deep into these different characters. So, let's do a vote.

On each occasion she is reminding the group that they are engaged in playful activity, however risky or uncomfortable it may feel. As with the presentations of self in performance, where each expression is judged for validity by the witness (Goffman, 1959), there is always risk in play. Without the potential for gain and loss there is no motivation to engage in the activity. Indeed, much of the fun of play stems from juggling the risks of consequence. The drama frame can reduce risk of personal exposure and may therefore encourage bolder moves in playing the game. As Green notes, "playfulness may wither when the player feels unsafe" (2016, p.200). But if danger or discomfort are removed entirely we may revert to the benign types of functionalist, non-critical development I am seeking to move beyond. Risk and the opposite concept, safety, are treated only lightly in this study and may, as Sutherland and Jelinek (2015) suspect, be under-explored areas in organisations. But the idea of risk brushes up against a long-understood element of theatre: the acceptance that "When making art there are no mistakes. There are just things that don't work" (Ibbotson & Darso, 2008, p.554).

This section has opened up some of the more confronting aspects of using play as an aesthetic pedagogy. In it, I suggested that rules, risk and conflict or dissensus are essential

elements in playmaking. In concert with the other aspects of play identified in the previous section, presence and humour, they may even be necessary components of participatory research and development. In the final part of this paper I will offer some conclusions as to how the dynamics identified here might inform future theory development around the transformation of organisations.

SCENE 4: OPENING UP

The same, the end of the first morning session. Everyone is engaged in writing on post-it notes and affixing them to the white board. Music plays and there is some chatter, teasing and laughter as people finish. When everyone has finished placing their sticky notes on the board, LENY fades the music and everyone is seated again.

LENY: Okay, first of all, what is working about what we've done so far?
MIKE: From my perspective, I think we've created an environment where we can actually share, which is great. A really good dynamic, a good mix of people in the business which is great, because we can get different perspectives.
LENY: Cool, okay. That is working. What else is working?
STEFAN: We are being open, and honest, and constructive. Criticism and feedback on certain aspects that we bring up, I think it is really good.
MARGARET: When I first came in, I felt unsure, a bit nervous, well a lot nervous. Not really sure what to expect, but I'm feeling a lot more comfortable now.
LENY: That's great. I'm glad, thank you.
TIM: Laughter. I think the laughter is really helping to break down the barriers, making people feel more comfortable.
JOSS: Starting with some activities first of all, was really good. If we had sat down and gone straight into talking, it could have been a bit standoffish. We just loosened up to start with.
HENRY: I am pretty pleased that no one is backing away from a good challenge. Everyone obviously feels comfortable enough to discuss things openly and really get a point across.

In the introduction to this paper I claimed there are two primary contributions of playmaking as a methodology in organisational research and development. The first is in its participatory nature, where other theatre-based interventions are often externally driven by third-party providers. The second is the central positioning of play as an aesthetic pedagogy in processes of organisational transformation. In this final section, I will elaborate further on the connections to both of these aspects revealed in the data and close with some conclusions regarding the implications of the research.

The role of the developer in organisational transformation has received little critical scholarly attention and it is hoped this paper may open up some pathways in which to address this lacuna. For example, the data presented in this paper expose a tension between perceptions of a developer as "inside" or "outside" a development process, and the organisation. While such tension has been explored with regard to other research methodologies such as ethnography (Van Maanen, 1988), it has not been recognised in the context of arts-based development. The recognition of such tension could yield insight into the way developers interact with participants during organisational transformation. It may open up possibilities for developers to play with multiple, perhaps even contradictory, presentations of self in the micro performances of development, as LENY did in the data excerpts included in this paper. In so doing, it could help to answer calls from other scholars who have noted the dearth of empirical research into the "how" of development (Cunliffe, 2002; Mabey, 2013; Sutherland, 2012).

Equally, the theory that organisational development and transformation are collective and participatory processes has been under-investigated in literature. While Mangham and Overington (1982) suggested theatre-based practitioners views themselves as actors in a drama so that they might better appreciate the narratives within which they perform, the majority of developers still operate from the position of an external expert, a single knowing voice (Uhl-Bien, 2006). Cunliffe asks that we bring a critical consciousness to the nature of our narratives, and pay attention to "the part [we] play in constructing the "realities', "systems', "structures" and practices [we] critique" (2002, p.47). This paper extends these arguments by claiming that developers are not only implicated and complicit within the new realities that manifest in organisational transformation. They are also transformed along with the organisations and participants with whom they interact. As Prentki (2015a) points out, the commonly used analogy of developer-as-catalyst is inadequate. People cannot enter a situation or process to emerge unchanged (as catalytic chemical agents do). Any developer who thinks that is possible "is likely to be a person dangerously immune to processes of change wrought by dialogical encounters" (p.28). Part of a participatory approach, therefore, requires a willingness on the part of a researcher or developer to be transformed.

As researcher-developer, I was willing to be transformed. Scene four, *Opening Up,* begins with LENY's line "what is working?", demonstrating an appetite for feedback in order to adapt development practices "in the moment". What does not appear in this excerpt, but does feature in the original transcript, is my subsequent asking of the natural follow up question "what is *not* working", although in the latter case responses were brief and inconsequential, perhaps partly as we were nearly out of time. MARGARET's statement of reflection in *Opening Up* reveals that one of the key transformations participants may need to make is to become more willing to be transformed. She uses the term "comfortable" to express how she is feeling towards the end of the process. Where the future transformed state is unknown, as this research claims it must always be, willingness can be elusive. Participants, like organisational decision-makers, like to know where they are going and seem uncomfortable with unknowns. Yet, if, as the excerpts of this paper suggest, development is a fluid process without predictable outcomes, it follows that participants cannot, in any case, be transformed from one state to another, but are continuously transform*ing* in the performance of development. One of the challenges this paper presents to those engaging in organisational development, therefore, is how to generate a willingness to transform.

The paper offers a potential answer to this challenge, in the form of play as an aesthetic pedagogy. I was fortunate that I encountered an organisation and participants who were willing to venture with me into the unknown. This study suggests, however, that it may have been more than good fortune that led to such a commitment. In each of the vignettes, the framing of activities as playful and participatory is a central aesthetic and pedagogic factor of the unfolding development performance. In this final vignette, *Opening Up*, for example, there is evidence that participants have found meaning in their experience of all four identified aspects of play as an aesthetic pedagogy. The comment "starting with some activities" and "loosened up" hints at the sense of presence and spontaneity the games elicited in the early stages. Humour is noted in the comment "laughter is really helping to break down the barriers". Conflict is seen in the comment "no-one is backing away from a good challenge", and a sense of order is reflected in the statement "we've created an environment where we can actually share". Typically in development work, play is used only as a marginal activity, either in warm-up games or ice-breakers. This research argues that play should permeate the very core of participatory research and development. Playmaking may be one way to achieve such an infusion. With its associated aesthetic pedagogy of play that incorporates humour, presence, rules and dissensus, playmaking may help create the

conditions for all actors, including researchers or facilitators of development, to willingly contribute to and be changed by a participatory organisational transformation process.

Early in this paper, I outlined the argument that arts-based research helps to access "fresh perspectives" (Eisner, 2008). With this aim in mind, I invited my reader to enter my research in a more holistic way than conventional publication formats usually allow. The perspective accessed in this paper claims that the transformation of organisations is an ongoing participatory process in which researcher-developers transform along with their co-participants. Playmaking demonstrates this in action. If, in such practices, "we develop one other" as Brecht argued (1948, p.12), the implication for theory is considerable. The idea that developers are complicit in the transformation experience of themselves and others compels us to take even more seriously the question "of what or whom are we in the service" (Taylor & Thellesen, 2006)? It opens up multiple avenues for critical empirical research, particularly into areas of developer identity, ideology and intentionality that have begun to feature in AT scholarship, but are, as yet, absent from organisational studies.

The core "aesthetic pedagogy" of play in playmaking delivers theoretical and practical implications. It helps answer Neelands" call for "pedagogic positions and desires that are intentionally located in the shifting borderlands of the social/artistic in ways that blur or confuse the comfortable and leisurely distinctions between art and work, aesthetics and politics of Western sensibilities" (2004, p.51). It allows the scholarship of development to move beyond the functionalist, normative mode that still prevails (Mabey, 2013). The transformation of organisations will always be political. Even in a playful development environment there are power dynamics that must be surfaced; perhaps through enabling moments of "communitas', as suggested in the discussion of scene 2b, perhaps through deliberate dissensus, as witnessed in scene 3. Play as an aesthetic pedagogy also shows the transience of transformation. In development that is playfully, socially constructed, there is no definable end-point or outcome. One practical implication of this is that arts-based development might infuse organisations in an ongoing way, rather than be treated as a discrete, bounded intervention. To conclude, Sutherland and Ladkin note, "we lack a focus on how educators work with participants to co-create an enlivened, empowered learning space that becomes a nexus of lived experiences, stories, theories, concepts and ultimately deep learning" (2013, p.106). Playmaking and play as an aesthetic pedagogy may help provide such focus and help us better understand the way organisations and their members transform.

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About the Author

Dr Leny Woolsey is a leadership development practitioner and researcher at the University of Auckland, currently Director of Student Leadership Programmes. She specialises in creative methods of development, particularly theatre, music and play-based techniques. Her PhD study investigated the relationships between developers, participants and organisational stakeholders in participatory, arts-based leadership development programmes. Leny also holds a BA in Acting from Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh, and an MBA from the University of Auckland. She has worked as an actor, business development manager and programme manager for executive education and performs regularly with various musical ensembles near her home on the East Coast of New Zealand.