When Qualitative Research Meets Theatre: The Complexities of Performed Ethnography and Research-Informed Theatre Project Design

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Abstract

In this paper we describe three areas of design that need to be considered when conceptualizing a performed ethnography/research-informed theatre project in the field of education: research design, aesthetic design and pedagogical design. We present 30 questions that performed ethnographers and research-informed theatre artists might ask ourselves when we conceptualize our projects. We then provide a discussion of four recent projects that engage with the questions presented and conclude by arguing that (1) research design and aesthetic design interact with and feed into each other and (2) research and aesthetic decisions impact on the pedagogical work our projects do.

Introduction

The Growing Popularity, Significance and Complexities of Performed Ethnography and Research-Informed Theatre in Qualitative Research

As many *Qualitative Inquiry* readers already know, performed ethnography and research-informed theatre are research methodologies that involve turning ethnographic data and texts into scripts and dramas that are either read aloud by a group of participants or performed before audiences. In the last 20 years, the use of performed ethnography and research-informed theatre research methodologies in our field of educational research has grown in popularity across Canada, the United States, Britain and Australia (Ackroyd and O'Toole 2010, Denzin 2003; Goldstein 2012, Saldaña 2005, 2011). For example, in Canada, it is practiced at the Arts-based Research Studio at the Faculty of Education,

University of Alberta (<http://abrstudio.wordpress.com>), within the “a/r/tography” research group in the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia (<http://m1.cust.educ.ubc.ca/Artography>) and at the Centre for Imaginative Ethnography at York University (<http://imaginativeethnography.org>). As well, there are now two theatre-related research methodology courses offered at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto (OISE/UT): Performed Ethnography and Research-Informed Theatre and Applied Theatre Research in Performance Sites. Also at OISE/UT, the Research-Informed Theatre Exchange (RiTE) meets monthly during the academic year to provide an opportunity for research-informed theatre artists and academics to come together exchange ideas, discuss their work, and share best practice. In the United States, the Art-Based Educational Research (ABER) Special Interest Group (SIG) within the American Educational Research Association (AERA) (<http://www.abersig.com>) provides a space for performed ethnographers and research-informed theatre artists from around the world to share their work. In Britain and Australia, several important methodology books have been published (Ackroyd and O’Toole 2010 and Brown 2010) providing researchers with strong examples of performed ethnography and research-informed theatre projects. Finally, an international community of scholars and artists interested in the subject regularly attend the International Congress for Qualitative Inquiry held at the (American) University of Illinois in Urbana, Illinois.

Performed ethnography and research-informed theatre methodologies have become popular in Western educational research because they provide researchers with particularly rich ways to collect, analyse and share research. The richness comes from

three sources: (1) the ethnographic research from which a play script is created; (2) the reading or performance of the play; and (3) the conversations that take place after the reading or performance. In these follow-up conversations, research participants and other readers or audience members have input about the conclusions of the research. This allows for ongoing analysis of the research findings. The incorporation of audience input into on-going revisions of the play provides an opportunity for collective analysis, and in doing so, can help create more ethical relationships between researchers, their research participants and the communities to which the research participants belong. Post-reading/performance conversations also allow educational researchers to link up their research to their teaching and larger public forums on pressing social issues. For example, at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) of the University of Toronto, where Tara Goldstein works as a educational researcher and teacher educator, the reading and performing of critical ethnographic scripts have engaged teacher education students, and the general public, in critical analysis and discussions of critical teaching practices in the areas of multilingual, anti-racist, and anti-homophobia education (Goldstein 2000, 2004c, 2004b; 2013; Sykes and Goldstein 2004).

Articulating the Complexities of Performed Ethnography and Research-Informed Theatre Design

While the methods of performed ethnography and research-informed theatre are becoming increasingly popular in Western educational research, designing a performed ethnographic study is a complex task. In this paper we argue that there are three areas of design that need to be considered when conceptualizing a performed ethnography/research-informed theatre project in the field of education. They are research design, aesthetic design and pedagogical design. Sometimes these three sets of

design demands compete and lie in tension with each other (Goldstein 2008) presenting performed ethnographers and research-informed theatre artists with a variety of issues and dilemmas to resolve when conceptualizing and implementing their research projects.

Below we present 30 questions that performed ethnographers and research-informed theatre artists can ask when they begin to conceptualize their projects. The questions are organized into eight sections: goals and assessment; audience(s); responsibilities to research participants; responsibilities to the audience(s); responsibilities to the research-artistic team; ethnographic research design; aesthetic and theatrical design; pedagogical design and honouring and negotiating multiple commitments to research, aesthetics and pedagogy. The questions were developed from discussions that took place in Goldstein's Performed Ethnography and Research-Informed Theatre graduate course in the winter of 2013, which the rest of us attended as students or auditors. Following this presentation, we offer four discussions of recent performed ethnography or research-informed theatre projects each of us has been involved in, drawing on the 30 design questions to describe our project conceptualization, outline our planning and unpack the ways we attended to tensions that emerged. In doing so we hope to illustrate the usefulness of thinking about the task of performed ethnography or research-informed theatre design alongside some of our 30 questions.

30 Questions for Performed Ethnography and Research-Informed Theatre Project Design

Goals and assessment

1. What is/are the goal(s) of this project?
What do we hope to achieve?
2. How will we assess this project?
How will we know the extent to which we achieved what we hoped to achieve?

3. How will we demonstrate to those who are assessing the project (funders/peers/the research participants) that the work is ethical/legitimate/credible/trustworthy/rigorous?

Audience(s)

4. Given the goal(s) of this project, who is/are our primary audience(s)?
 - The research participants?
 - People who work with the research participants?
 - A public audience?
 - All of these?
5. In what ways does knowing who our primary audience(s) is/are impact on the way we:
 - Write the script?
 - Make aesthetic choices in direction, dramaturgy, performance?

Responsibilities to the research participants

In one of the discussions in our Performed Ethnography and Research-Informed Theatre course discussions Julia Gray proposed that performed ethnography/research-informed theatre artists and practitioners are responsible to three groups of people: the research participants, members of the audience, and members of the research/artistic team. The next three set of questions work build on Gray's proposal.

6. What are our responsibilities to the research participants?
 - Have we been transparent and clear about what we plan to do with the information/stories they have shared with us?
 - Have we created a space in our planning for member checking?
 - Is it necessary/desirable for us to ask the research participants about when in the process *they* want to be involved in member checking?
 - At what moment(s) in the process is member checking important?
 - After the transcripts are completed to see what information in the transcript can be used and what can't be used?
 - After the script is completed?
 - Before the first workshopping of the script with actors?
 - During the first workshopping of the script with actors?
 - After the first workshopping of the script with the actors?
 - Several of these? All of these?

- During member checking what we looking for?
 - To see what we got it right/right enough?
 - To see what we got it wrong?
 - Both of these?
- If during member checking we find out that our participants have concerns about how their words/stories have been represented, how will we proceed?

Responsibilities to the audience(s)

7. What are responsibilities to our audience (s)?
 - How much background knowledge about the project needs to be provided?
 - How will we draw the audience into the performance? How will we engage them?
 - How will we work in alliance with our audience's needs?

Responsibilities to the research-artistic team

8. What are the responsibilities to the research-artistic team?
9. During the first workshopping of the script with actors, to what extent do we see the actors' work as part of the analysis process?
10. What are the implications of considering the actors as part of our analysis team?
 - In terms of authorship/acknowledgement on the project?
 - In terms of obtaining their formal consent to participate in the project (which is especially important in projects that are subject to an institutional ethical review)?
11. Is it important that the actors who are *workshopping* the script come from the same (ethnic/cultural/racialized/class) communities as the research participants?
 - Why?
 - Why not?
12. Is it important that the actors who are *performing* the script come from the same (ethnic/cultural/racialized/class) communities as the research participants?
 - Why?
 - Why not?
13. Is it important that we provide the audience with information about the research project?
 - Why?
 - Why not?

- What needs to be shared?
- How will it be shared (with a display in the lobby, a live introduction, through a program, within the script itself, within the performance itself)?

Research Design

14. What research paradigm underlies the research study (Creswell 2013)?
15. Is the paradigm compatible with a methodology of performed ethnography/research-informed theatre?

Howe and Eisenhart (1990) propose a number of questions that a research-artistic team might answer in building their research design.

16. Do the research questions drive the data collection and analysis?
17. Are collection and analysis techniques completely applied in a technical sense?
18. Are the research/artistic team's assumptions and subjectivities made explicit?
19. Does the project have significance within one or more [academic] conversations about social life?
20. Does the study have "value" in informing and improving [some kind of] practice?"
21. What kinds of identity, institutional and systemic politics will arise in implementing this project? How will the team respond to these politics?

Aesthetic and Theatrical Design

Drawing from Patrice Pavis' (1985) work on theatre analysis, Jenny Salisbury has created a number of questions that a research-artistic team might answer in building their aesthetic design.

22. Given the goals and research of the project, what are the narrative and textual foundations that will hold the production together? Dani Snyder-Young (2010) suggests that performed ethnographers might look to playwrights and/or performance artists whose work shares themes with their data and use the forms they choose as aesthetic models. Similarly, in one of our course discussions Pamela Snell suggested that in research-informed theatre the goal is to tell the story that is emerging from the data collected for the project. Decisions about how researchers might tell that story arises from the data itself. Possibilities include:

- An imagined story and characters, which is supported by the research;

- A series of direct address speeches, directly quoting research participants (through the use of verbatim transcripts or found materials);
- Montage;
- Collections of words and images which create thematic links, without a linear structure;
- A linear/climatic structure; a circular/serial structure; a combination.

Other important questions to ask about the narrative and textual foundations include:

- What elements of translation might be at work in the performance of the research?
- What structures and frames of genre are being employed/exposed/deconstructed in the production?

23. Given the structure and goals of the project, how will the elements of the production inform/present the work?

- Performance space (classroom, conference, black box theatre, outside, etc)?
- Costumes & set?
- Lights & sound?
- Acting/directing style?

24. Given the structure and goals of the project, what will the relationship of the audience be to the performance? (Note this is different from question 5 above)

- Where are the spectators physically situated in relation to the performers?
- What is the expected/invited level of participation of the audience?
- To what extent is the audience expected to interpret/generate meaning?
- What access will spectators have to research material/participants/researchers/artists/education beyond the moment of performance?

25. How will the site of performance be noted, captured, documented, disseminated and archived?

- Through a script?
- Through film?
- Through photographs?
- Through rehearsal notes?
- Through an academic paper?
- Through some other means?

26. In the relationship between the research, the performance, the audience, and all the participants, are there performance elements to be included that support the dissemination of the research findings?

- Music?
- Dance/movement?
- Abstract images and sound
- Silence?
- Absence?

Pedagogical Design

27. Do we want to push, provoke, disturb the audience?
- If so, how will we do so?
 - If so, what opportunities will be provided for the audience to talk about their responses to our provocation?
 - Is it important that we provide the audience opportunities for post-performance discussion after each performance?
 - Why?
 - Why not?
 - Who might facilitate these discussions?
28. Is it important that we create discussion guides to accompany the scripts/performance?
- Why?
 - Why not?
 - Who might write the discussion guides?

Honouring and negotiating multiple commitments to research, aesthetics and pedagogy

29. After analyzing the data, writing and workshopping the script/devising the performance, have we privileged one set of (research, aesthetic, pedagogical) commitments over another (e.g, a research commitment to thick ethnographic description and social and cultural analysis over an aesthetic commitment to drama and theatricality or an aesthetic commitment to drama and theatricality over a research commitment to thick ethnographic description and social and cultural analysis)?
30. If so, have we found a way to be transparent about the commitments we've privileged?

Confounding the role of participant and performer: Using the questions to negotiate vulnerability, ownership and artistic merit in youth-led research-informed theatre – Pamela Snell

*Delirious*ⁱ was a research-informed theatre project that engaged a group of youth to explore the themes of substance abuse and mental health. Youth participants were

chosen for the project based on their interest in the arts, their experiences with the thematic areas, and their desire to become leaders and peer educators. The project unfolded over the course of a school year, with the group meeting two afternoons a week (September 2010 – June 2011). After getting to know one another, the group began doing research about substance abuse and mental health in preparation for creating a play to be toured to high schools across the city. The research phase (September 2010 – December 2010) included exploring personal experiences and stories, attending workshops by service providers, resource centres, and advocacy groups, as well as finding information through pamphlets, the internet and community organizations. The youth wanted to understand what substance abuse and mental health looked like in their own lives and reflect that on the stage. Many of the youth had complicated relationships to substance abuse and mental health, and from their own narratives sprang rich theatrical and educational potential; this positioned the youth as both researchers and research participants during the first phases of the project. As the group's focus shifted from research to play development, so shifted our roles. The youth became performers, and I added director to my list of roles, which also included facilitator, primary investigator and youth counselor. This confounding of roles meant that understanding the purpose of the work, and navigating responsibilities and tensions between the roles became even more pronounced (Question 6).

Through workshops, discussions, character work, improvisation, and story development, the group spent 2-3 months devising a short script that reflected their research (January 2011 – March 2011). The format of the play was a structure similar to the film *Crash* (Gray et al 2011), where multiple story lines involving characters from

diverse social backgrounds move in and out of each other's lives; the play followed a range of characters whose plot lines interwove in surprising and interesting ways. It was at this moment, with a script completed, entering rehearsals and one month until our first performance that tensions began to emerge. Many of the youth suddenly stopped showing up to rehearsals and when I asked them why, I was met with a shrug of the shoulders. It quickly became obvious that without performers we could not continue with the script that we had spent months developing. We called a group meeting and set about figuring out why people were no longer showing up, why there seemed to be tension between group members, and how we were going to meet our performance deadline. What emerged was the realization that as research participants many of the youth felt the script reflected only the experiences of those who had taken a lead on its development and therefore, they felt unwilling to participate as performers. In essence, many of the youth lacked a sense of ownership over the play, and in turn chose to disengage from the project. Deciding how to move forward meant exploring the goals and responsibilities within the project design (Question 29). The primary goals were that of peer-to-peer education and youth leadership. So, pushing the script forward was not an option as it disempowered many of the participants through their lack of ownership.

In my role as director, I was eager to have the youth share their own personal narratives, but realized that this would put them in a much too vulnerable position within the scope of this project, and in my confounding role of counsellor I knew that would be asking too much. With all of these intersecting tensions and roles colliding, a collective decision was reached: individuals and small groups would create their own short artistic pieces and hopefully in a few short weeks everything would come together to create

something whole, something each person could be proud of and that spoke to the months of research we had done. The youth divided themselves up and worked based on interests; spoken word, scenes, videos, poems, songs, and even a group to create a pamphlet of the research findings and discussion guides. How it was all going to become a single performance was left up to chance and the final aesthetic design, a thematic rough-around-the-edges variety show, did not solidify until our tour was underway. The following journeys of Matthew and Antoine, two youth participants, highlight the importance of stopping mid-process, asking the hard questions, and changing directions to re-align with the project goals, which in this case were peer-to-peer education and youth leadership.

Matthew is a shy young man, someone who is nervous when he speaks, but expresses himself beautifully through visual art. When the shift in performance format occurred, and we moved from a scripted play to a collection of short artistic pieces, Matthew suddenly had the freedom to determine his own contribution. He disappeared for a week and then reemerged with a series of comic book images and an accompanying story. He wanted the images he had drawn to be projected above the stage while the story was being read. He was nervous to perform and asked Jalal if he would read the story on stage. Jalal was happy to take on the additional role and after the first couple of performances Matthew became confident in his work and asked Jalal if they could perform the story together. Shy quiet Matthew became more animated as the performance tour continued and towards the end was sharing his profound thoughts and insights openly during the question and answer period. He had found his voice and used it

magnificently. In this case, the flexibility of the mixed aesthetic allowed for us to meet a responsibility to Matthew, who emerged as a performer and leader (Question 8).

Antoine is a young man who was referred to the group from a local mental health organization, he had ongoing struggles with addiction and depression and he had challenges making connections with his peers. Antoine had a very intense history, with a tendency to over share, making himself vulnerable, and other group members uncomfortable. He was searching for somewhere to fit in. When it came to participating in the creative process he found it very challenging because of difficulty focusing. He was shuffled around a lot as the group tried to frantically develop the new performance and in the end Antoine performed a poem that he found online. He was the only participant to not work as part of a team and to not contribute original artistic work. But he was able to take that poem and make it his own, because it spoke to him and his experience. He did not participate in the same way as his peers, yet, he was able to find one small thing and do it well, which meant that he felt proud, he felt ownership, and he felt part of a bigger whole. By taking on a new performance format and privileging the need to minimize barriers to participation over other research informed theatre commitments, Antoine was able to stand in unity with his fellow participants (Questions 6, 22).

Delirious ended up becoming a multi-media mash-up, flexible enough to accommodate the needs of each participant. Every performance we gave was slightly different as elements were shuffled around, roles were re-cast on the fly, and sections were included or excluded depending on who was present. Scripts were in hand for every performance and the youth passed a microphone around on stage. But, in this case the

responsibility to the participant's vulnerabilities and ownership outweighed other commitments and what emerged was an aesthetic design that matched the needs of the participants; an original, raw, and honest aesthetic that provided a rich and engaging conversation with audiences. The tensions between the competing elements (research, pedagogy, and aesthetics) ended up feeding one another, we were first and foremost committed to the pedagogical journey of our participants, and this in turn defined our research design, and our artistic design. All of the elements came together to build something that could not have emerged without stopping to ask what our commitments were and how they were unfolding in a constant state of collective reflexivity.

Writing and Performing the Other-Tara Goldstein

Harriet's House (Goldstein 2012b) and *Ana's Shadow* (Goldstein 2012a) are two performed ethnographies about a transnationally adoptive same-sex family that I researched and wrote to engage my teacher education students in sustained conversations about Other people's families. Like Lisa Delpit (1995), who coined the term "Other people's children", I use the term Other people's families to refer to families who have been marginalized and/or oppressed by their experiences in school. The ethnographies examine the everyday experiences of transnational/transracial adoptive lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) families. The research that has informed the writing of the two plays comes from (1) my reading of a variety of personal narratives about growing up and living in transnational/transracial adoptive and same-sex families; (2) my viewing of a number of film documentaries about growing up and living in these

families and (3) a set of interviews I undertook with people living in transnational/transracial adoptive same-sex families. *Harriet's House* tells the story of Harriet's adopted daughter Luisa, and her return to Bogotá to find her birth mother and connect with her Colombian linguistic and cultural heritage. *Ana's Shadow* picks up the story of Harriet's family three years later and features the story of Luisa's sister Ana, a singer-songwriter, who has no interest in speaking Spanish with her sister or returning to her birth country (to download copies of the scripts which reference the research materials I used go to www.gaileyroad.com). In choosing to research, write and teach with two performed ethnographies about the lives of people living in transnational adoptive families, I hope to not only inform the work teachers do with these particular kinds of families, but with many other kinds of families as well including: immigrant/newcomer families; mixed-race families; families learning English as a second or additional language; blended families, and families led by grandparents or other family members.

As a project that aims to generate discussion about Other people's family lives, questions of writing and performing the Other (questions 11 and 12) were central to the development *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow*. In this short piece, I share the casting decisions the artistic team made for the performance of *Harriet's House* that was produced for the 2010 Toronto Pride Festival. I also reflect on what was problematic about our decisions and discuss a set of important conversations about writing and performing the Other that recently took place at the annual Playwrights Guild of Canada (PGC) conference in June 2013.

The first conversation the *Harriet's House* artistic team had about issues of race, ethnicity and casting practices emerged during auditions for the roles of Luisa and Ana. After the first set of auditions, the actors that the director Jocelyn Wickett thought were best suited for the roles of Luisa and Ana were not Latin American or of Latin American descent. Canadian actors Supinder Wraich and Rebecca Applebaum identified as South Asian and as white and Chinese. While Supinder was fluent in Spanish, Rebecca was not. The team worked hard to find young actors who were either born in Latin America or came from families of Latin American descent and invited them to the second set of auditions. Unfortunately, none of these actors were as experienced as Supinder and Rebecca or as well suited for the roles of Luisa and Ana.

Before making a final decision about casting Supinder and Rebecca, the artistic team had a sustained conversation about “non-traditional casting” for the roles of Luisa and Ana. To guide us in this conversation, we read an article from *American Theatre* entitled “Opening the Golden Gate” written by actor Lily Tung Crystal. In the article, Tung Crystal interviews several casting directors about issues of race, ethnicity and equal representation in theatre. I was particularly interested in the way Leslie Martinson, the casting director of TheatreWorks in Palo Alto, California, talked about the difference between color-blind casting and non-traditional casting:

Color-blind casting as a phrase is reductive—it implies that someone’s cultural context can be set aside. Culture is part of the richness of who we are as human beings. It’s usually important to actors in a hundred different ways—why would that not be important on stage? Our commitment is to have the conversation about what role ethnicity plays in a particular production. Sometimes it moves up in

import, sometimes down. We're rigorous in examining our assumptions, and I push directors to examine their own (p.67).

In talking about the role ethnicity played in our production of *Harriet's House*, the team came to the conclusion that while issues of language, culture and race were at the heart of the play, particularly for Luisa who was attempting to reconnect with her cultural heritage in Colombia, it was more important for the actors playing Luisa and Ana to understand the issues at stake than it was for them to identify as Colombian or Latin American. Supinder and Rebecca were called back to audition together during the second set of auditions. In a discussion of the issues that came up in their audition scene, both actors showed that they had a good understanding of the different views Luisa and Ana held about their linguistic and cultural heritage. Both actors could also relate their characters' beliefs to their own experiences and perspectives. We felt we had found strong actors to play Luisa and Ana, and felt confident about our decision to cast non-traditionally (to download digital recordings of *Harriet's House* and *Ana's Shadow* go to www.gaileyroad.com).

Our decision was not unproblematic, however. By casting Supinder and Rebecca in the roles of Luisa and Ana, we were not providing work opportunities to local Latin American actors who had a deep interest in a transnational story about Colombia and Canada. While we had worked hard to find Latin American actors for the second set of auditions, the number of actors we actually auditioned was small despite the fact that there are two professional Latin American theatre companies in Toronto. If Gailey Road Productions had developed a relationship with these companies before the audition process had begun, we might have been able to attract a larger group of Latin American

actors to our auditions and we might have found a Latin American Luisa and Ana.

Lesson learned.

Representing range in research and performance: Engaging the questions in aesthetic design- Jenny Salisbury

The *Roots Among the Rock* project was a collectively created play developed through the Ask & Imagine program of the Faculty of Theology at Huron University College, in London Ontario (Glover et al 2010). It took place in the summer and autumn of 2010, and brought together seven university students as researcher/performers to devise a new play in response to the college's ongoing work with Canadian youth and faith communities. I am the assistant program director for the Ask & Imagine youth theology program, and was the artistic director of *Roots Among the Rocks*ⁱⁱ. The play centered on questions of faith in the 21st century, and how a young person navigates experiences of church, community, and identity. It was structured on a respect for diversity, inclusion, and personnel experience. The show was developed through interviewing over 70 volunteers representing a breadth of age, religious experience and Canadian geography. The work was framed by an understanding that each person's story was unique and specific, but still had something to contribute to a wider understanding of a cultural experience. *Roots Among the Rocks* premiered at the Anglican Church of Canada's General Synod on June 8th, 2010, in Halifax, Nova Scotia, then toured from Newfoundland to British Columbia. The goal of the project was to gather a variety of stories, perspectives, and experiences, and share them with the very communities that provided them – an effort to “report back” the findings of the researcher/performers.

The company took great care in creating an aesthetic design that rigorously represented the breadth of the conflicting and complicated research material, as well as

artistically addressing tensions between differing theologies, experiences, and pedagogies. The Ask & Imagine program director, Judy Steers, and I worked closely together as we lead the team of researcher/performers through a series of workshops and rehearsals that pushed us to make artistic choices that illuminated the goals of the project. We endeavored to create a performance where the form of the piece, the narrative, performance style, tone, and artistic expression, reflected the research findings. Our ethnographic research revealed a cultural experience that was fluid and shifting, with no unifying experience or concern. To reflect this in performance, the company drew on several influences from both Research-Informed Theatreⁱⁱⁱ and traditional performance, to create a non-linear play that focused around a central idea, abandoning a theatrical continuity of character, setting, plot or style. The structure was very much like a jazz piece, with themes emerging and fading. Using this serial structure, the company was able to mirror the variety of findings in the research with a variety of performances on stage.

In addressing question 22 and 23, the company chose to use a variety of performance styles throughout the piece. Out of respect for the people who volunteered to be interviewed, we approached their specific words with the performative rigour of realism.^{iv} Our actors spoke, behaved, and interacted with one another in a manner that strove to resemble the individuals who had been interviewed. We changed the names, and often combined two or three interviews that ran along similar themes. Before bringing it to performance, we shared our script with the volunteers whose words were being used directly (Question 6), as we strove to meet our responsibilities to our research subjects. Alternatively, in scenes where the actors embodied academic, historical or

sacred text, we often used a storytelling theatre technique, with shared narrative and heightened physical performance. Storytelling theatre is often used in Theatre for Young Audiences, or epic theatre based on fables, and combines direct narration, symbolic gestures, pantomime, and non-realistic movement. This helped our audience understand which scenes were derived from what type of research material, and how to interpret the variety of research that was presented. For example, a passage based on the words of an interview subject would be represented as follows:

(MELISSA crosses down stage, and puts on a priest's stole.)

MELISSA

I decided to become a priest right after I had my breasts removed. My mother had died at 40, from breast cancer. So had her sister and their mother. Those are my women, my blood, my breasts. So, when I was 39, my doctor said: Okay, Jane, it's not a question of if, it's a question of when. You've had your babies, you don't want any more; let's have them off. She was right – but it was a nightmare. I'm a motorcycle momma. Come on now, look beyond the collar, and imagine me an angry teen in the early 80s. Rock and Roll, baby. I've got a bit of the devil inside me, and I always thought I'd die young anyway. I love to speed and I enjoy a pint. I didn't put that in my vocation documents.

Whereas in sections where the performance was based on published text, the performance style took on a very different tone:

(MELISSA and JD cross to a large piece of fabric that they stretch out along the entire width of the stage. The two actors begin an aggressive "tug-of-war".)

MELISSA (HAUNT) I...I...I...I. Do you think that you can live without us?

(KARYN crosses to centre stage, and steps into the fabric. She moves the fabric about her, creating images of torment and capture. Eventually, she is tied up in the fabric, and abandoned centre stage.)

JD AUGSTINE) I was blushing for shame, for I could still hear the dim voice of those vanities,^v

MELISSA (HAUNT) I...

JD (AUGUSTINE) My vanities

MELISSA (HAUNT) I...

JD (AUGUSTINE) and still I hung back in hesitation.

Roots Among the Rocks incorporated dance and silence as artistic choices that reflected great emotion and spaces of tension in the research (Question 26). A number of interview subjects shared personnel stories of “coming-out” as a gay person, and that being a time of upheaval in their faith life. Research participants placed these stories within a spectrum of emotion ranging from reconciliation, healing and joy, through to extraordinary hurt and pain. Due to the variety of interviews we gathered, and the private and vulnerable nature of the content, our company chose to explore this category of story through dance. We found that dance could capture the emotional fabric of these experiences in spaces where words either divided or failed. Dance also allowed audiences to approach the work with fewer political lenses. Human sexuality, particularly the question of gay marriage, was, and continues to be, a divisive conversation in the communities we visited (Question 5). We wanted to share the stories we had collected with integrity, and avoid as much as possible the political and theological debate that is better suited to other arenas. The dance offered an experience that could be interpreted and approached from a number of different viewpoints. When the piece was performed for the individuals who had shared their stories with us, it was met with gratitude and approval. It was able to capture the vulnerability, complexity, and emotional core of a story, without sharing specific details or forcing conclusions. The piece was framed with poetry and monologues that drew the audience back into the larger themes of the piece.

In reflecting upon Questions 29 and 30, it is clear to me that the *Roots Among the Rocks* project privileged its responsibility to its pedagogical framework over our aesthetic

and research responsibilities. This tension was built right into the project design. Before the research was conducted and a team was assembled, the project was intended to tour to 30 communities across the country, and to act as an invitation to further story-sharing within a variety of faith-based organizations. Knowing that this was the goal shaped our response to other contributing factors of the performance, such as our “coming-out” dance piece. While challenging, we did not find this privileging detrimental to our process, but it was heavily influential. We attempted to be transparent about these choices within the actual performance. Each presentation of *Roots Among the Rocks* began with a welcoming moment from someone deeply involved in the project, speaking directly to the audience. In this opening speech, the audience was told how the show was made, who it was made for, and what we hoped to achieve in sharing it (Question 18). To this end, we were clear that our goal had been the conversation itself (Question 1). After each performance, the audience was invited to engage in discussions with the creative team. These structures were created in an effort to invite the audience into the process of the project, revealing the work and the choices that contributed to *Roots Among the Rocks*.

Challenging discourses of tragedy about dementia: Moving research and pedagogical goals forward through aesthetic design- Julia Gray

I will draw on an example from a still-in-progress research-informed theatre project, currently titled *The Dementia Project* (Gray et al., 2013)^{vi}. This research-informed theatre project was initiated to critique the dominant discourse of tragedy around Alzheimer’s and related dementia and open up space for a new discourse of possibilities that recognizes embodied expression, agency and relationality of people with dementia (Dupuis et al., 2011; Kontos & Naglie, 2007). Our aim with this project is to

reach health care practitioners, policy makers, administrators, as well as people with dementia, their family members and the broader public encouraging a broader culture shift in the way we understand dementia and engage with those who have the disease.

The play has been in progress since the spring of 2011, and has included several months of meetings between the team's health researchers^{vii} and the playwright/director (me) to discuss the main ideas and themes that we wished to be included in the play (between May 2011 and May 2012); a set of focus groups with people with dementia and their care partners asking them about relationships in their lives and what makes life worth living (December 2011); a one-day interactive arts workshop with people with dementia, their care partners, visual artists, actors and health researchers to explore what people with dementia would want the world to know about them and their experience with illness (November 2012); and several creative development phases with the playwright/director, actors and health researchers to explore the emerging themes and focus group transcripts (May, June and September 2012, April and June 2013).

For the purposes of this article, I will unpack how a particular scene was shaped within the play taking into consideration ethnographic research, aesthetic and pedagogical commitments (Goldstein, 2008a, 2008b). The scene I will examine takes place between Caroline and her brother Clay and is rooted in realism (which values fidelity to real-life conversational dialogue (Brockett, 1991)). The broader play, however, is situated within magic realism (which portrays realistic settings infused with magical, imagistic impressions and physical gestures (Maufort, 2006)). As such, while this specific scene appears to be 'straight-forward' stylistically, artistically it is situated within a play that implicates metaphors, visual imagery, as well as a mix of naturalistic

and poetic language. The dynamic style of magic realism offers us the opportunity to challenge audience's perception of the linearity of time and experiences of those living with dementia, draw on metaphor to explore complex emotions, and develop a complex relationship between stage-action and audience members encouraging critical and emotional engagement. Caroline lives with her mother Elaine, who has dementia, and her life partner Alex. All characters are fictionalized composites, based on participants from the focus groups as well as people in the lives of the artist/researcher team.

The following is an excerpt from the focus groups conducted in December 2011 of a family care provider, proving support to her husband who is living with dementia. She is speaking about a conversation she had with her son about his father (the participant's husband).

Well, I went over to visit him [my son] once because I said – when I knew he was home... And I said to my daughter-in-law, "Is XXX [my son] home? And she said, "Yes." So I said, "Well, I'd like to go up and talk to him." And so I went up and talked to him. I said, "What is this? I need help you know, I need your support." "Mom," he said, "I can't." This is the man [his father/my husband], they used to go canoeing, you know. He [my son] can't accept it. He's 58 years old and he can't accept it.

Participant, Family Care Provider

This focus group excerpt acted as the foundation for the scene that follows, between Caroline and Clay.

Scene

CLAY is standing down stage centre facing the audience, with a bottle of (micro-brew) beer in his hand. CAROLINE enters.

CAROLINE Rachel said you were back here.

CLAY Hey Care, I didn't know you'd be over.

CAROLINE Well, I just dropped by. Didn't know I'd be here either.

CLAY Oh. Well that's great. Hi. Would you like one?

CAROLINE No thanks (*pause*). It's looking great back here.

CLAY Really? It feels like we still have far to go.

CAROLINE Well, you see it every day, and I haven't been here in a while, and I can tell you it's looking great.

CLAY Well thanks.

CAROLINE Clay, I need your help.

CLAY Oh, OK.

CAROLINE With Mum.

CLAY Oh.

CAROLINE I'm just, I, like, Alex is awesome, I wouldn't be able to do it without her, but, uh, we need help. Mum needs a lot of help, and we're both working. Just something from you. Like, taking Mum out to the library. Or something.

CLAY Well, maybe I can talk to Rachel and she can find some time/

CAROLINE No, Clay, I need help from you.

CLAY I can't.

CAROLINE I'm sorry?

CLAY I can't, Caroline. I/

CAROLINE What do you mean, you can't?

CLAY Work is crazy, there's a lot of shit right now, like up to my eyeballs. I'm not even consistent in my doing. I can barely keep track of anything. I'm not sure how much help I would be.

CAROLINE Do you have any idea, what, what... Like, I can't even leave her alone, she keeps leaving the burner on, and we've got her in these day programs, but, she's in bed all the time, and, I just, can't. It is very, very stressful, Clay. It's a lot of weight.

CLAY I can't do it. I've got too much.

CAROLINE Fuck you.

Pause

CLAY This is the woman who taught me to canoe, Caroline. She taught me to hook a worm, she taught me to skin a fish.

CAROLINE Yes.

CLAY It's too much.

CAROLINE Yes, I know.

CLAY I just remember her and Dad, radio's on in the kitchen, waltzing. That's the stuff I want to remember.

Pause

CLAY It's like when they got divorced. We were all grown up, right? And yet it was... suffocating. We couldn't grieve, we were supposed to have our own lives and be self-sufficient and all that. But, how do I... It makes it difficult to be steady.

The decision to change the relationship in this scene from mother/son to sister/brother came from two sources; 1) additional data beyond this specific excerpt indicated to us that often there is tension between siblings caring for a parent that we

wanted to reflect, and 2) through our creative development process, certain characters were emerging that we wanted to pursue and capitalize on (who, ultimately, were emerging out of and reflecting the data). This scene was presented as part of a works-in-progress presentation in June 2013 after the completion of a creative development phase, with an invited audience of family members of people with dementia, health professionals working with people with dementia, health researchers and artists. This presentation allowed us as artist/researchers to see if the work was resonating with audience members.

Response to this scene was very strong. Audience members felt that the tensions between Caroline and Clay reflected emotions and concepts that people had experienced or witnessed in their own lives, especially relating to gendered responsibilities. It was clear that each of these grown children were struggling with their mother's disease differently. There was a desire to see more of the character of Clay through the rest of the play (currently, this scene is his only scene). If Clay's role were to increase, audience members seemed divided about how much growth Clay might experience through the play. Some wanted to see change in Clay, perhaps coming to a "new regular," as a way to offer audience members some kind of solution about how to move forward with a family member living with the disease. Conversely, some felt Clay's struggle to be in the present with his mother was 'truthful' and important to reflect. Certain audience members discussed how 'solutions' do not always happen in 'real life' and so to present something discreet and bite-sized through the play would be forced and insincere. An interesting debate ensued about whether the play should put forward solutions, suggest pathways or options about how to engage with people with dementia, or, in fact,

encourage non-solutions such as being in the present with the person with dementia rather than trying to ‘fix the problem.’

With this feedback, discussions among the team (actors and health researchers) returned to what our pedagogical goals for the research project are, and how these might be best achieved through the aesthetic, interpretive process of developing the play. We agreed it was better to *show the story and the struggle* of Clay and the other characters, rather than *tell about* solutions to the ‘problem.’ This struggle provides audience members the opportunity to experience the story alongside it (Thompson, 2009), with the intention of the audience’s own assumptions about people living with dementia being revealed with the revelation of the characters’ own transformation (Mamet, 2010). We agreed our goal is to draw audience members into the action of the play so they can be engaged emotionally *and* critically. We felt that, because we paid attention to the interrelationship among research, pedagogical and aesthetic goals of the project, a rich discussion occurred post-presentation for audience members. The combination of the rich research findings, a dynamic, complex aesthetic design and an in-depth post-presentation discussion provided space for audience members to engage with key ideas and emotions in empowering, non-didactic ways.

Closing Remarks

In this paper we have discussed what it might mean to design performed ethnography and research-informed theatre projects that recognize multiple commitments to research, aesthetics and pedagogy. In developing her youth project *Delirious*, Pamela Snell found that it was challenging playing a variety of roles – researcher, youth counselor and director – within the project and discussed the importance of privileging

the development needs of the youth she was working with over the aesthetic and research needs of her project. Like Snell, Jenny Salisbury found herself privileging pedagogical responsibilities over aesthetic and research responsibilities in her project *Roots Among the Rocks*. In casting *Harriet's House*, Tara Goldstein found herself asking a number of questions around the politics and ethics of representing Other people's families in performed research. And Julia Gray, in *The Dementia Project* had to work through a variety of issues to powerfully represent her research team's findings about living with dementia aesthetically.

While each project described here brought its own unique challenges, issues and questions, we argue that asking questions about research, aesthetic and pedagogical design and responsibilities can help prepare researcher-artists for the complexities that will inevitable accompany their projects. Many researcher-artists have primary identifications and commitments to their work as either researchers or artists. Here we have argued it is important to consider the ways research design and aesthetic design interact with and feed into each other and the ways that research and aesthetic decisions impact on the pedagogical work our projects do.

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ⁱ The project name and names of the participants have been changed to protect the anonymity of youth participants.

ⁱⁱ For more information on Ask & Imagine or *Roots Among the Rocks*, please visit www.askandimagine.org. Script forthcoming.

ⁱⁱⁱ See Goldstein 2012b, p. 1.

^{iv} See Hodgson 1988, p. 308.

^v Please note that in this example, Augustine's lines come from *The Confessions of St Augustine* Book 8, Chapter 12. See Augustine 1886.

^{vi} *The Dementia Project* is being developed through funds attained through Canadian Institutes of Health Research. Ethics approval was received through the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Waterloo.

^{vii} The research team includes Dr. Sherry Dupuis (PI), Partnerships in Dementia Care (PiDC) Alliance, University of Waterloo; Dr. Gail Mitchell, School of Nursing, Faculty of Health, York University, York-University Health Network Academy of Nursing; Dr. Pia Kontos, Toronto Rehabilitation Institute – University Health Network, Dalla Lana School of Public Health; Dr. Christine Jonas-Simpson, School of Nursing, Faculty of Health, York University.