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Fugitive Knowledge: Performance Pedagogies, Legibility and the Undercommons in *Applied Theatre Research* 6(2): pp.121 – 137.

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ABSTRACT - 128

In *Held*, the criminal justice project I conducted at the University of Leeds with 2nd year theatre and performance students, performance pedagogies were structured to produce an ethnodrama. As part of the course, I developed partnerships with community-based partners - Leeds Magistrates, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation service, and Ripon House. Students presented the performed ethnodrama to partners and invited guests.

In this article, I put forward how such performance-making enables students to interrogate their own understandings about the criminal justice system. In particular, they were asked to think about precarity, criminalisation, and how institutions rely on authoritative readings of ex-prisoners' records. In doing so, I reflect on how higher education institutions produce knowledge. Throughout I offer critical framing influenced by Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's *The Undercommons*.

Key words

Criminal justice

ethnodrama

undercommons

fugitivity

performance ethnography

legibility

Higher education institutions

arts and criminal justice

In 2017, I convened a collaborative performance project at the University of Leeds with 2nd year theatre and performance students. The semester-long course, with a focus on criminal justice, resulted in in *Held*. The process drew on performance pedagogies (Denzin, 2003) that were collaboratively structured to produce an ethnodrama (Saldaña, 2011). As part of the course, I developed partnerships with community-based partners - Leeds Magistrates Court, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation service, Ripon House and Cardigan House (two 'halfway house' hostels for people post-release) along with input from other third sector organisations. The process included interviews, creative workshops, presentations by professionals, court visits for fieldwork observation and performance devising tasks. As an outcome, students presented the performed ethnodrama to partners and invited guests. This article engages with the contexts and implications of such learning opportunities as pedagogies of the undercommons. This focus emerges from a critically reflexive applied theatre scholar-practitioner asking crucial, innovative questions about practice and politics of performance pedagogies. It centres on finding ways to set up learning experiences for students and the questions, opportunities, provocations that arise.

My own artistic practice with people in prison developed through creative workshops in which we devised performance work together over 15 years of work in male and female prisons in the UK and South Africa. When transposing the methodology to work with partners external to Her Majesty's Prison Service, two challenges became evident. The first was that in order to maximise the students' potential to learn about the criminal justice system, they needed to work with multiple partners. The second challenge related to the issue that there was no pre-existing group of workshop participants. This necessitated a shift to fieldwork methods that do not follow a standard creative arts workshop model. The resulting project, explored below, became a hybrid, pedagogically responsive applied theatre intervention. This article offers a means of theorising about particular ways of working with students, rather than an evaluative report of applied theatre practice. As it proceeds, I interweave the scholarly material with some examples of scripted

material developed by the collaborative project authors. The extracts are intended to offer a further level of analysis to the socio-cultural theorisation of practice.

> **Extract from script: *Held*, with a focus on housing**
>
> I used to have these dreams where I was at home. I knew it was home 'cos I had my dog there. Bella. And I could hear my nan's TV show on in the kitchen. And it smelled like ketchup and corn. But then I would walk out of the room and the whole place would change into long corridors and I wouldn't have a clue where I was and when I turned round to go back to my room I couldn't find the door anymore. Stuck in this corridor. These past months while I've been here I'm thinking about home. The estate I grew up on. It was earmarked for development a while back now and everyone was moved out. I'm feeling a bit… rootless. Like I dunno where home is anymore. Cos I was moving round after I left home and now that I'm coming out I don't know what I'm going back to. Like, what even is my neighbourhood? Where should I even be dreaming of now?
>
> (Collaborative Project authors, 2017).

Part 1: Contexts of precarity and legibility

The current milieu in the UK is characterized by precarity and vulnerability. Our institutions are exposed as colonial monoliths not readily accepting change; our leaders are signing policies into law that perpetuate rather than manage inequalities; and our economies are circumscribed by fear of one crisis or another. Such contexts demand different approaches to knowledge and pedagogies that flow in unexpected directions. From the perspective of applied theatre, this suggests hope for the particular values of critical methodologies – and performance in particular, to enable navigation of the terrains of precarity.

Guy Standing's work (2011) *The Precariat* seeks to broaden the definition of precarity beyond merely the socio-economics of people who have insecure employment or who lack economic security. He hopes to avoid romanticising or solidifying the term, precisely because precarious social, political and economic

conditions change and expand. While at one time discussions of precarity might have focused on an underclass, the proliferation of student debt, the global financial crisis and the persistence of punitive welfare systems have meant that precarity is more furtive, more ominous than it might once have been. It is not a phase, it is not time bound, but a condition that structures relations. Taking this further, in his introduction to a special issue on precarity and performance, Tavia Nyong'o says that:

> Perhaps precarity is not solely intrinsic to life in its individual existence but also in and through its collective repetition across lives. Perhaps this collective persistence is why precarity is always on the move, why it forms such a fugitive, provisional scene of study (2013: 158).

The performance and pedagogy work I consider here is particular to fugitivity, stealing legitimacy and appropriating frames of representation. I offer a means of thinking about legibility via Moten & Harney (2004; 2013a) while maintaining as a core focus the particular value of performance for exposing, articulating, enacting, undermining or embodying the specifics of representation. By legibility, I am referring to what is recognisable, or what is read, received or understood by audiences of certain behaviours. In the context of criminal justice, that means how offending and re-offending are central to how behaviours of people leaving prison are understood by probation and other criminal justice professionals. In this, I am extending from Peggy Phelan and her well-rehearsed arguments about the life of performance in relation to representation. In particular, I am thinking about the focus on what is unmarked/ unremarked that Phelan produces as having 'validity' even if it defies legibility (in an authoritative sense) (1993).

My focus is related to the particular epistemological challenges posed by legibility when it comes to institutional collaborations between HE institutions and criminal justice in the context of precarity. To this end, I work towards analysis of the collaborative performance project with UK undergraduate students at the University of Leeds, but prior to that, I concentrate on theorisation of fugitive knowledge.

Rather than result in a sense of hopelessness about politics, the difficulties of representation or the poverty of political theory in this moment of precarity, I propose that performance pedagogies can edge towards a precarious but productive frame for revealing political contestation in the public sphere.

James Scott's work *Seeing like the State* (1998) sketches a wide-ranging exploration of legibility in terms of the state and subjects – especially in terms of how law inscribes these relationships. His interest is in the state's role in mapping, codifying, measuring and making visible the value of the population – making a clear link between property and the worth of citizens to the state. Scott's perspective concerns how states 'attempt to make society legible, to arrange the population in ways that simplified the classic state functions of taxation, conscription, and prevention of rebellion' (Carson, 2011: 1). There is a sense, then, that legibility is about defining and structuring modes of belonging, inclusion and exclusion for the proprietary state. This sets up the various functions of states, including policing borders for those that are not legible to the nation-state (for example, the *sans-papiers* discussed by Conquergood (2002) and theorized in relation to visibility and appearance by Sophie Nield, (2010)). The relationship between visibility, legibility and state control is perhaps most evident in terms of the legibility of the law: punishing those who transgress or defy legibility; and ensuring that functioning in everyday life contributes towards maintaining the state's operations. In this regard Scott's theories are obviously influenced by Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977) in relation to theories of spectacle and the means by which citizens are absorbed into these operations: of registers, records, ledgers and files that to the bodies of state stand in for our actual presence. This is also discussed in Sarah Bartley's (2017) examination of participatory performance and the unemployed body's relation to its value to the state in the UK. It is not an enormous leap to consider how incarcerated bodies are made legible to the State through the process of law-breaking, sentencing, and punishment.

Of the challenges caused by incarceration, there are particular issues related to those who transgress the law and how they are seen: by the state, by wider society

and in their communities. In criminology, Nicole Rafter discusses Scott's theorization of opacity and legibility. His methodological approach, she says, helps underscore the point that the state:

> Ensure[s] and constantly increase[s] legibility of the populations and activities under its control. When the state's project of seeing ever further is applied to prisons, it not only makes criminals legible but also cuts off gazes other than those of state authorities. How can we move beyond the state's structuring of our vision to 'un-see'? (Rafter, 2014: 132).

From feminist criminology (Bosworth, 1999), we know that when considering the impacts of incarceration for women in particular, this usually involves a problem with housing and most likely, the destabilization of families, including children being taken into care. In the light of this, it becomes necessary to consider, beyond statistics, how we might see people differently – not merely as ex-prisoners (or ex-offenders in the official UK terminology) – but as people who aim to return to the social sphere.

What is relevant for applied theatre in particular is the significance of practices that work to reveal what is legible and what is not with communities that are usually relegated to the margins. In this project, it was also about revealing legibilities across the power differentials between ex-prisoners, criminal justice services and students.

> **Extract from the script, Held, with a focus on the intention of the work.**
> I've got a problem with representation.
> Not legal representation. Ha! Just anxiety – haha. The students' domain.
> Anxiety that this performance can't do all this justice:
> "Hello everyone! I'm white, middle class, and I'm privileged… let me HELP YOU!"
>
> I've been to court. Sitting there for cases over and over. But now that we're making this performance I'm worried about representing stories. Having words in our mouths. We are not you. This is not one person's

> story. It is a mixture of scenes from court, probation, and approved premises. We wanted to meet people coming out of custody, do drama workshops and play. But then that would have been weird. To play with your life stories. As though they were a bit of fun. So here we are. Anxious. Wanting to do justice to your words, your experiences. And also, just knowing that a show ain't gonna cut it. Real life is a different game. But hey. We're here – walking through some imagined scenes and peeking into some stories about lives that go far beyond our own experiences. And yeah: We're anxious: to do you justice.
>
> (Collaborative Project authors, 2017).

In the module, instead of preparing the students to deliver prison workshops, we conducted lessons for the first five weeks in the magistrate's court, doing ethnographic fieldwork. In addition to workshops and reading about the arts in criminal justice in the UK, they spent self-directed study sessions in pairs or threes attending Leeds Magistrate's courts in the public galleries to discover the performativity of criminal justice, and to observe the kinds of stories that were playing out in courts. Overwhelmingly, the students' reflexive work demonstrated the value of these visits in destabilising their existing positions, assumptions or prejudices about crime and justice. My aim was to have a means of working with people coming out of prison and the professionals that work with them to better understand the challenges faced during resettlement. In the approved premises we worked with a range of women whose offences ranged from shoplifting to those incarcerated for serious offences and people with concurrent mental health diagnoses. However, when working on practical tasks with students and women, we decided to avoid giving attention to offending-behaviour focused theatre programmes such as Theatre in Prisons and Probations (TiPP) (Thompson, 1999) or Geese Theatre (Baim et al, 2002). Such programmes have been less dominant in recent years in the UK because of a more restrictive, targets-driven system.

Some of the findings suggest some of the ongoing problems in criminal justice that relate to legibility: namely that the contexts for offending in the first place do not

disappear while people serve a sentence. While people have a record, or are stigmatised by criminal behaviours, they are deemed legible as criminals. This legibility does not get erased by serving a sentence; which is re-inscribed in the use of the term 'ex-offender'. Nor does time inside do anything to erode the precarity, poverty, or chaos that might have characterised people's lives before offending. The element of training or addiction-focused programmes that can contribute towards reducing reoffending are important to mention, but what is notable is that as women tend to serve shorter sentences than men, they are less likely to complete courses that would assist them gaining future employment, for example. This can lead to inevitable 'churn' or re-offending.

The students attended workshops in Ripon House, and conducted interviews with senior probation officers and workers in the two residences for people released from prison. This included discussion groups, poetry writing sessions, one-to-one sessions and dialogues. The students then made a collaborative ethnodrama script that we worked up for an event that was attended by 50 people representing 20 community based organisations, as well as residents from Ripon House. The main activity included a talk-back action workshop after the show, which was performed by the students.

> **Extract from script: *HELD*, with a focus on probation**
>
> **Tina:** Here – I'll make us a cuppa.
>
> **Tracey:** (*sighs loudly and sinks into her seat)* This is the 2nd meeting he's missed (*talking to one of her colleagues, Lucy*).
>
> **Lucy:** He's really not helping himself at all *(looks up from computer and sits back and takes a sip of coffee)* It all depends on the individual circumstances - their behaviour in the past. In my training last week they said - is this unusual; is this part of a pattern? Are there any risk issues to consider? Has the person disappeared? Have they kept in some contact? Are there risks with suspected increased drug/alcohol use?
>
> **Tracey:** I really don't want him going back to prison… that's not what he needs, he needs help, he should've done his courses.

> **Lucy:** Well when he's ready, he might cooperate: what are his past convictions?
>
> *Tina walks in, holding documents in one hand and a coffee in another. She sits down and starts organising which piles of paper go where.*
>
> **Tracey:** umm *(looks up to say hello to Tina)* Oh morning love, (*looks down at papers)* Drug and alcohol abuse causing him to steal to fund, with multiple robberies and to top it off he is a compulsive liar.
>
> **Tina:** Who you on about? Sean Whiteman? (sarcastically) What was he lying about this time?
>
> **Tracey:** *(takes a sip of coffee and pinches a biscuit from the biscuit tin)* Well apparently, his grandmother died… but that would be his sixth grandmother.
>
> *(All the women smirk and roll eyes at each other).*
>
> (Collaborative Project authors, 2017).

Part 2: On Performance and Methodologies

My understanding of performance methodologies owes much to colleagues committed to exploring politics and performance not merely as mutually beneficial metaphors that account for publics and representation but also those conceiving of the legibility of (il)legitimate identities and social positions (Ridout & Schneider, 2012). In her work on the border apparatus as a space of appearance and the space of the law necessitating a flux between appearance and disappearance, Nield (2010) draws on empirical examples in order to re-work the potency of 'theatrical', 'performative' and 'performance' as sites of ethical engagement (2010: 43). In the context of performance studies, there is an existing grammar of performance as method as well as location of study. Similarly, in cultural studies, thinkers such as Paul Gilroy have argued for ways of knowing that de-centre the text and destabilise authorial significance when their work is engaged in studies of the margins. Gilroy says critical scholars need to move beyond this 'idea and ideology of the text and of textuality as a mode of communicative practice which provides a model for all other forms of cognitive exchange and social interaction' (1994: 77). In applied theatre,

this serves as a justification for embodied ways of knowing that eschew Western, colonial means.

What I want to put forward is how performance enables the institutionalized knowledge of what is legible to be critically interrogated in action**,** and in a way that de-privileges institutionalized knowledges already familiar to students in higher education. This is productive considering that institutions and big business claim efficacy on the basis of performance – as discussed by Jon McKenzie (2001). This sets up an important discussion point in relation to claims for efficacy (or indeed, impact) in the context of HE institutions; as well as in relation to criminal justice institutions that are now contractually obliged to 'perform' rehabilitation/ reducing reoffending (Liebling, 2004). In both, there are obvious critiques of neoliberalism and how the public good is eroded and redefined in relation to who counts as 'the public' and what constitutes a 'public good' (also productively explored by Giroux, 2013).

The UK has a long history of collaborative, community focused interventions based on performance, but working in non-theatrical contexts. In part, the commitment to using theatre and performance outside of the professional arena has contributed to the growth of applied theatre. Many of these projects are aligned with or enmeshed within higher education institutions. In criminal justice, there have been well-regarded projects that are focused on offending behaviour, concerning violent behaviour, alcohol abuse or relating to social 'masks' (Watson, 2009). Each of these projects has collated a wealth of data to evidence the changes in behaviour of participants. In my own practice-led projects in criminal justice settings I seek to turn the interrogative gaze towards the role of performance itself, rather than place an additional scrutiny on the participants, who rather become co-researchers exploring the ways performance operates for them within the institutions and beyond.

Thus, in the collaborative student-led project at the University of Leeds, my students considered the different manifestations of discourses of rehabilitation, corrections, resettlement, and the tensions they noted between policy and practice. Rather than focus attention on the prisoners or ex-prisoners as participants in workshops, they

attended to the provocative materials of governance, regimes and records. In this way, the focus was strategic, and not individualized. For students, I suspect this was challenging, given the much more easily digestible 'effects' of a successful workshop with creative outcomes. Yet, as Moten and Harney propose:

> The ones who would correct and the ones who would be corrected converge around [the] imperative of submission that is played out constantly not only in that range of correctional facilities that Foucault analysed – the prisons, the hospitals, the asylums – but also in corporations, universities and NGOs (2013a: 80).

This disciplining function adds to the probability that people involved in the criminal justice system have a natural suspicion of 'authority'. This could result in skewed data – either because respondents resist participation, or because they provide answers they believe the researcher wants to hear. Some of the reasons for this could be the opposing desires of prisoners and ex-prisoners, either to form allegiances with students as 'outsiders' who may be perceived to have empathy, leading ex-prisoners to share too much personal information, or to assume that outsiders will stigmatize and judge and therefore withhold information. Both poles present challenges for the external researcher, who must navigate the charge of emotional manipulation and create an atmosphere of trustworthiness and openness to engage participants. The claim for manipulation (or in prisonspeak, 'conditioning') is one of the foundations of security awareness.

When making the work, the students thus needed to remain reflexive about how they juggled these tensions. One response was to ensure we maintained a student voice in the work, so that while some of the scenes were character-driven, some intersecting monologues maintained a student/ researcher voice in order to emphasise the sometimes-competing discourses related to trust and authority. This is valuable in ethnodrama because it enables a sense of criticality – the students were not simply drawn into empathetic representations of one side of criminal justice or another. The set design, which included big piles of paper and long strips of

paper hanging in the space, exemplified the volume of files, laws, papers and cases that are being dealt with within the criminal justice system. This reflects James Scott's thinking about the legibility of people to the state discussed in the earlier part of the article.

Part 3: Theorising the Undercommons

I now turn to the work of Fred Moten and Stefano Harney, whose theorisation of the *Undercommons* (2004; 2013a) offers strategies for destabilising the norms and values of institutions, aiming for the production of 'fugitive knowledge'. This knowledge must be produced from and by the precariat, the marginalized and the delegitimized as a means of resisting institutionalisation. Their work is wide-ranging, centring on the values that aim to critique how knowledge is produced.

Their compelling work proposes, from a sense of urgency, a revisionist, abolitionist, utopian approach to knowing that Jack Halberstam characterizes as 'wanting to constitute an unprofessional force of fugitive knowers, with a set of intellectual practices *not bound by examination systems and test scores'* (2011: 8, my emphasis). Halberstam's introduction to the selection of essays in *The Undercommons* notes that Moten & Harney highlight the creative potential of fugitivity:

> And what does the undercommons of the university want to be? It wants to constitute an unprofessional force of fugitive knowers, with a set of intellectual practices not bound by examination systems and test scores. The goal for this 'unprofessionalization' is not to abolish; in fact Moten and Harney set the fugitive intellectual against the elimination or abolition of this, the founding or refounding of that: "Not so much the abolition of prisons but the abolition of a society that could have prisons, that could have slavery, that could have the wage, and therefore not abolition as the elimination of anything but abolition as the founding of a new society" (113) (cited in Halberstam, 2011: 8).

What Moten and Harney propose is a radical reworking of hegemonies and a new approach to expertise versus experience that aligns education with practices of

building networks, solidarities and commonalities that can contribute towards social change. These are ways of knowing that are accomplished not via managerial metrics such as REF or TEF or anything legible to the institution, but according to social bonds. I'm using these UK acronyms to signal the Research Excellence Framework and the Teaching Excellence Framework that are managerial sector wide exercises in the UK, and are tied to state funding for higher education, as well as forming a further quality exercise that can be linked to differentials in tuition fees. Similar exercises are conducted in Australia - the Excellence of Research in Australia (ERA), with the related approach taken in Canada by RIC, Research Impact Canada.

This managerial use of acronyms found an echo in *Held:*

> **Extract from script: *Held*, on the bewildering acronyms of criminal justice *(chorus sequence)***
>
> ARV GOAD CPS DDA DTO FDR ASBO GBH ACCT ABH MAPPA TWOC ACR HMP CALM YOI CARATS IMB CATC ICM NOMS IPP CPRO COMPS ROTL IPP RDR C&R STAR CDRP VDT CAO VO CJA YRO.
>
> (Collaborative Project authors, 2017).

In practice, forming those ways of knowing based on social bonds requires tactics of fugitivity – which Moten & Harney consider to be the opportunity to put resources in service of meaning-making outside the frame of the institution. For me, their relation to legibility is about directionality: in the sense of *who* is legible and *to whom* is not only about people's lived experience; but how and why they are notated. In cognizance of the issues raised in much of the current applied theatre scholarship, this is not simply about 'giving voice', but about aesthetics, form, genre, audience (White, 2015). For Moten & Harney, this pedagogy requires a differential in terms of the direction of notation – who has the right to make legible or to legitimize the experiences of those leaving prison except themselves?

In this theorisation through the project *Held* my aim is to consider how performance pedagogy has opened up issues of framing, legibility and legitimacy of 'vulnerable' or marginalized participants for HE students. The example enables the consideration of

fugitivity as an approach that can re-view how we see, and learn about, the criminal justice system through participatory, collaborative performance. I am interested in how performance strategies and the creation of performance required re-thinking about frames and legitimacy in relation to crime and justice. In the process, what I hope emerges in between the positioning of fugitive methods and performance is their particular value for research and collaboration in and about situations of precarity.

Firstly, and probably in common with many practitioner/ scholars in the performing arts, I need to recognize and problematize the modes and outcomes of undergraduate courses that pander to professionalization in the UK. One way of marketing the 2nd year course I lead in collaboration with a range of partner organisations is as 'outward facing', with a focus on employability and transferable skills. I am also wary of the trap Moten & Harney signal of producing a pragmatic student-subject that appears to model a benevolent liberal agenda of knowledge exchange. That agenda is furthered by reportage or evaluation-focused studies that report on benefits, outcomes and impacts. In this, although I am committed to applied theatre and performance, what I propose to do here is not to promote further such a course by reporting on its successes, but (without wishing to draw a binary opposition), to explore how an undercommons or fugitivity is produced instead.

In some ways, Moten & Harney's (2004; 2010; 2013a; 2013b) approach is readily experienced by pedagogues aligned with black and minority ethnic studies, and ready to engage with resistant, non-hegemonic or decolonised ways of knowing; and also by black and minority ethnic students whose university attendance is not so taken for granted as some of their white middle class colleagues. In fugitive study, with the presence of counter-narratives (which can also include class and nationality), group learning is already established as an 'unsafe place'. By this, I mean a place of destabilising hegemonic thinking, exposing epistemological biases and rendering existing world-views impoverished at the same time as asserting the need for a radical critical imagination (Giroux, 1996; 2013).

Although this can sound like a violent approach that doesn't particularly accord with applied theatre pedagogies, it is a mode of radical critical pedagogy that is possible in theatre and performance because the form is processual, embodied and can be in dialogue (Denzin, 2003). It can emerge via failure (Halberstam, 2011), disruption and tensions. In *The Undercommons*, (2013a) radical uncertainty is productive; revising one's prejudices is necessary, and learning about the limitations of institutions and knowledge in the face of experience is part of the deal. This kind of pedagogy is not new of course, but it s value lies in the explicit acknowledgement of the borders, the distances and the ambiguities that open up in attending to community-based partnerships. Gloria Anzaldúa's (1999) call to remain in the ambiguities is consistent with the practices of fugitivity – partly by establishing multiple registers, languages and potential audiences for knowledge as legitimate. For her, this is a methodology of border crossing, and I propose that what is needed between HE institutions and worlds off-campus is a similar, consciously fugitive, border-crossing.

As the course convenor I draw on my own research with women in prison, which is based on methodologies of performance ethnography that are informed by feminism and that have the potential for engaging a specific and located view of problems in criminal justice. Simultaneously, ethnographic practice in the field of prison can engender what Mary Bosworth calls the 'tyranny of intimacy' (1999: 73). In the case of women's prisons and probation, performance and ethnographic accounts can help expose misery, chaos, violence and abuse; but too much concern with personal narratives can cause research to lose sight of the contextual causes and effects of the criminal justice system. As such, I aimed to ensure the students were engaging with the most recent data from the Prison Reform Trust (2017), and the many other third sector organisations publishing reports about prison conditions and challenges of release.

> **Extract from the script: *Held*, with a focus on support services for women**
> Yesterday some of us got out and about to go down to the Together Women project – talk about housing stuff, you know? And there's a woman

> there that looks like she's gonna break if you touch her. Just quiet. Keeps herself to herself. Looks like a little bird that fell out of the nest. And one of our lot kept wanting to reach out to her, make her smile. But it was a bit too much. Big fuck off smile painted on her face not exactly gonna make lass in the corner cheer up. In the end we had to go. Just left her in there with a cold mug of tea looking at pamphlets. I mean, girl's gotta pick herself up a bit, you know? Free now. Nothing holding her back no more.
>
> (Collaborative Project authors, 2017).

The undercommons recognizes the value of making connections, building solidarity and fuelling a more active approach to social justice as a compelling and necessary pedagogy. The students did not simply read about successful interventions, or learn about challenges faced by women, but they were also exposed to cycles of criminal justice, from the courts to the hostels. They needed to imagine, and then confirm through rigorous research, their relationship to the challenges identified by the probation team and women.

In an interview with Stevphen Shukaitis, Harney points towards the tension of working with students in community contexts:

> there's a kind of fear in the university around something like amateurism – immaturity, pre-maturity, not graduating, not being ready somehow – and the student represents that at certain moments […] an openness to being affected by others, dispossessed and possessed by others (Shukaitis 2012).

This attention to affect and its value for collaboration is not new to performance studies and is the cornerstone of applied theatre practices (Thompson, 2011). It is also the basis for effective production of dramatized materials, and this led me to work with performance ethnography as method.

Part 4: Getting Fugitive with Performance Ethnography

Arts-based research processes are bound to present a set of representational problematics by virtue of textuality, privilege and the limitations of academic

registers. In my own work on prison cultures (2019, forthcoming), I am concerned with ethical dilemmas raised by fieldwork encounters, or by performance representations. I hoped to enable student work that incorporated their own tensions, anxieties and relationships to the issues that emerged.

The practice of performance ethnography (Denzin, 2003) draws on established theatre in prison methods, for example the earlier work of Thompson (1999, 2003) and Baim et al (2002). This includes games and exercises as well as devising methods in order to create collaborative performance. In other words, the method is reactive to and dependent on the specific responses in the room. Some of the initial stimulus materials included extracts from plays by Clean Break Theatre Company. These short extracts formed thematic starters for devising material on several themes, including: friendship inside, dependencies and triggers; the interrelated complexities of the worlds surrounding women leaving prison that was explored by a range of writers in *JoAnne* (Bruce et al, 2015). These were chosen as a means of iteratively reflecting on the subject matter of representation as well as providing a starting point for discussion on women's experiences of resettlement after incarceration. They also became a means of demonstrating to students how perspectives and modes of writing on the same topic can result in different styles of performance text.

In the *Held* project, I decided to deviate from working in prisons to challenge the assumption that a few theatre workshops contribute towards any kind of liberal emancipatory agenda. Instead, we worked in partnership (Leeds Magistrates, Her Majesty's Prison and Probation service, Ripon House, Cardigan House). In practice, the most fruitful collaborations came from the probation teams and the women and staff at Ripon House. The practical methods of research for a performance ethnography demand that students develop careful and detailed documentation strategies. Researchers are warned to engage with reliable and consistent means of recording workshops, focus groups and interviews. Yet, most prisons and hostels do not permit access to sound recording devices, and video and photographic documentation is limited for internal security reasons and because of the need to protect victims of crime. Thus, the means and modes of documentation become of

primary importance when engaging in criminal justice based research & practice. To counteract this challenge, we developed documentation strategies that include a range of sources to be reflexively put into dialogue with each other during the fieldwork and in the construction of the ethnodrama phase of the project.

Firstly, students keep a practitioner's reflexive diary (including both 'archival' reflections and current thinking, shifts, and notes). The diary allows reflection on a range of different levels, engaging with material conditions such as space and the workings of the regime and institution including time, activities, staffing and policies. The diary also recorded emotion and affect, as the students understood it through embodied or linguistic expression. In my own work in prisons, I made notes relating to personal narratives – particularly articulations of 'habitus' – that were specifically to do with everyday life inside, and not details relating to crimes or legal cases. I also documented the aesthetic choices made in workshopped improvisations relating to images, objects, genres, and metaphors. Finally, the diaries include the student researchers' affect, notated in their reflections, notes, and concerns. For example, in one session in Ripon House, one of the women was very excited to receive a phone call from her child, but became quite disturbed when the line was bad. The feeling of this moment was interpreted into a repeated trope throughout the performance:

> **VOICE:** Hello?
> are you there love? I cannae really hear you?
> I'm going to have to let you go…
>
> (Collaborative Project authors, 2017).

Those fieldwork diaries also included data relating to the project set-up (the institution meetings and taster workshops), and to the bureaucratic journey of gaining access, as well as court visits. The 'documents' emerging from the process-based fieldwork formed the basis of the devising performance material. Interim 'results' were shared and negotiated with participants and the wider community by staging a sharing of the work in progress and getting all the managerial level partners to ratify the script for accuracy.

Several critical considerations emerged, relating to claims that are made about applied theatre interventions. By theorising from this example, I am proposing that the radical pedagogic approach emerging through applied theatre methods and defined as the *Undercommons* by Moten & Harney is characterised by diversity. It demands dissonance and thrives on critical ambiguities. If so, then what happens when the university classroom is dominated by a particularly homogenous cohort of females, mostly white and middle class? When their reasons for choosing to work in criminal justice contexts are predominantly underscored by that middle class benevolence well known in the participatory arts? When class-consciousness and anti-racism have largely been left underexplored in other undergraduate studies? Further, how is it possible to reflect the radical potential of fugitive learning when students are also being assessed on their practice? These wider pedagogic questions remain relevant for colleagues teaching across the degree programme, but also serve as important questions for curriculum choices in all performance degrees.

Part 5: Towards a Fugitive Knowledge

In this overview of the project, as well as the extracts, I have positioned the students' production of knowledge as concerning legibility. They hoped to re-evaluate the frames of people leaving prison and the professionals who assist them. This could be seen as contributing to the benevolent labour of much socially engaged performance. Shannon Jackson's *Artificial Hells* looks to the spectrum of meanings in relation to 'the social turn' in the arts where, in addition to use value she signals the necessity for art to also operate within: 'critical, illegible, useless, and autonomous domains' (2011: 48).

In what ways, then, did this performance pedagogy refute some of the legibility and legitimisation also refuted by the *Undercommons*? Although it was not particularly a surprise, this course highlighted for me the difficulties students face with processes that are not predetermined, that are contingent and uncertain, precisely because they involve community organisations and partners. This mirrors the predominant interest amongst undergraduates in theatre as outcome, that also becomes inflected

by the student-as-consumer model now prevalent in UK higher education contexts - as discussed in Jen Harvie's *Fair Play* (2013).

> **Extract from script, *Held*. Choral Coda**
>
> Held:
>
> I was held on charges.
>
> Held:
>
> By the end of my sentence I was holding on with my teeth.
>
> Held:
>
> last night I held my breath just to see how long it would take to see stars.
>
> Held:
>
> Last time I held my lover.
>
> **VOICE:** Your call is being held in a queue and will be answered in approximately… 2 minutes.
>
> Your call is being held.
>
> (Collaborative Project authors, 2017).

Applied theatre practitioners will be aware of the ambiguity of many participatory projects with intents and practices that are negotiated and renegotiated with partners along the way. I noted that most of the students only seemed to understand the nature of the partnership at the final event, where dialogue was not only a concept, but they could accept that it was the main point of the event. This was of interest because it was obvious that the students did not all perceive that their learning processes, their fieldwork in court and meetings, and their interviews with residents in secure accommodation were legitimate. It was not performance, and therefore did not have legibility as 'the project'.

Feedback from a majority of the community based organisations praised the students for developing a nuanced performance that spoke to some of the intersecting complications that people face in resettlement. These include bureaucracy, the impact of cuts and precarity on community-based care, ongoing stigma and the tousle of legibility as 'offenders'. However, although the senior

probation officers had ratified the script, their understanding of the emphasis on women's struggles to become legible as individuals formed a challenge. These two senior probation officers suggested that more should have been made of victims of crime. In other words, although on the one hand, for the majority of the attendees, the performance served to legitimize women's resettlement issues, the systemic view of those in charge of plans attempted to return the narrative to what is legible to the criminal justice system: narratives of offenders and victims.

> **Extract from script: HELD, relating to pressures on probation workers and differing attitudes**
>
> **Lucy:** […] This is why I always say to you Ladies, home visits are vital as you see another side to their personality and if there are children involved, you go every three months or as often as you think is necessary.
>
> **Tina:** Home visits? Have you seen my caseload? Who's got time for home visits?
>
> **Lucy:** I'm just saying**… –** it's like your case Tracey isn't it; you know this poor lad Sean, didn't have the best start in life – dad's got a drug habit and no mother because she's run off and the poor kids don't have any role model or love or stability and this is what happens. You end up with multiple prison sentences and a criminal record for life for something that you couldn't change when you were an infant.
>
> **Tina:** Like I said, I'm making you a t-shirt for your birthday – 'bleeding heart'…
>
> **Tracey:** Come on Tina, you know what it's like - such a lottery: which service user gets which magistrate or judge; and sentencing is much harsher in the North than the South.
>
> **Tina:** well, that's 'cos it's grim up North, eh?
>
> (Collaborative Project authors, 2017).

In conclusion, I offer the following critical questions of the practice in the hope that the interrogative form continues the practice of fugitivity – never quite settling in

the place of the known. What might performance pedagogy offer in light of the squeeze on arts education, and the discourses surrounding a 'crisis' in the humanities in the UK? Here, I am drawing on thinking from Henry Giroux, amongst others, whose perspective highlights the necessity of dialogue:

> Questions regarding how education might enable students to develop a keen sense of prophetic justice, utilize critical analytical skills and cultivate an ethical sensibility through which they learn to respect the rights of others are becoming increasingly irrelevant in a market-driven university in which the quality of education is so dumbed down that too few students on campus are really learning how to think critically, engage in thoughtful dialogue, push at the frontiers of their imaginations, employ historical analyses, and move beyond the dreadful instrumental, mind-numbing forms of instrumental rationality (2013, online).

By thinking about moving beyond instrumentalism in service courses, or community-campus collaborations, I would like to consider how a radical rethinking of the public good towards an undercommons might be productive. Similarly, what is raised by this argument is how and whether this kind of framing of co-produced knowledge in and of communities can be extended into other areas of the curriculum.

Some of the more radical propositions made by Moten & Harney locate 'study' as a radical challenge to institutions. For them, a collaborative project such as *Held* could enable a different means of performing studentship. That raises an important challenge, beyond this project, for socially engaged pedagogies. It asks what a fugitive knowledge can produce between and across institutions that is beneficial beyond HE buzzwords such as 'impact' or 'knowledge production' or 'employability' or 'value added'. These challenges open up some of what the frame of fugitivity enables in performance pedagogy, and become vital for the future of applied theatre in higher education.

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