

Intergroup Dialogue in the Dramatic (Aesthetic) space The theory and practice of using dramatic action to nurture dialogue in conflicted situations (Ethnic, Religious, Hierarchical - in schools, the workplace, prisons, and other mixed cultural environments)

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Abstract - Dramatic Play in the Aesthetic space engages participants, with mixed and often conflicted values, in active, holistic dialogue. The “Players” engage in interpersonal and intergroup interactions, in order to investigate Identity – perception of self and “other”, Discrimination – recognizing and modifying personal roots of bias, and Democratic participation – through teamwork and consensual decision-making, in order to create dramatic vignettes around the conflicted issues.

Performing in the dramatic space also boosts performative, personal, and “artistic” skills, thus enhancing empowerment, attentiveness, and collaboration. The “Drama” or “Play” component, inspires creativity, originality, flexibility, spontaneity, confidence, tension release, and fun. The following paper is an attempt to map out the working mechanism of *Intergroup Dialogue in the Dramatic (Aesthetic) space*, and its multiple applications in the community, in healing and in organizations.

Keywords – Intergroup contact, Performativity, Aesthetic (dramatic) Space, Business Theatre, Conflict resolution, Dialogue.

I. INTRODUCTION

“The inmost growth of the self does not take place, as people like to suppose today, through our relationship to ourselves, but through being made present by the other and knowing that we are made present by him” (Martin Buber, in Vermes 1988)

The emergence of A.I. technologies has indeed raised important questions about the future of work and the need to reinforce the presence human intelligences, in particular empathy and meaningful dialogue. It is forecast that in recent years, many technological and information jobs will be roboticized, potentially leading to redundancies in currently sought-after vocations. The need to **see one another eye to eye**, and to resolve conflictual situations, whether in the workplace, or in the community, in ever-diversifying multicultural settings becomes imperative.

Cade Metz of the New York Times, in an article named *What Exactly Are the Dangers Posed by A.I.?* published May 1, 2023, quotes Oren Etzioni, the founding chief executive of the Allen Institute for A.I., “There is an indication that rote jobs will go away”, these projections will impact a change in training and hiring of a dwindling workforce and at the same time challenge our provisions for leisure activities.

The World Economic Forum, Future of Jobs Report 2023 reinforces the above observations, “The socio-emotional attitudes which businesses consider to be of increasing importance are curiosity and lifelong learning; resilience, flexibility and agility; and motivation and self-awareness – evidence that businesses emphasize the importance of resilient and reflective workers embracing a culture of lifelong learning as the lifecycle of their skills decreases.” (World Economic Forum. Future of Jobs Report 2023).

I would like to offer a glimmer of hope by reinstating the place of Art, Play, and dynamic Personal Performance as a way to contribute to **dialogue and inclusion** in both work and playtime, in the form of *Intergroup Dialogue in the Aesthetic Space*.

II. – THE INTERGROUP DIALOGUE IN THE AESTHETIC SPACE MODEL

In 1954 Gordon Allport published his seminal book *The Nature of Prejudice* where he introduces the idea of contact and acquaintance programs “The assumption underlying various participation and action programs is that contact and acquaintance make for friendliness.” (Allport 1954), Allport was responding to interracial prejudice in the United States. *Intergroup Contact in the Aesthetic Space* is an interdisciplinary working model which was the subject of My Doctoral thesis (Harris 2012), it derives from Allport’s contact theory and theories stemming from it; Social Identity Theory, in particular, theories based on Allport’s Contact Hypothesis (Allport 1954; Gaertner & Dovidio [eds.] 2005), and Pettigrew’s *Intergroup Contact Theory* (Pettigrew 1998; Tropp & Pettigrew 2005) and Social Psychology, and knowledge from the field of CBT (Community-based theatre), Augusto Boal’s (Boal 1995) *Forum Theatre* which stresses the properties of the aesthetic space liberating memory and imagination, and Drama Therapy as in Landy’s *Person and Persona* (Landy 1993).

Ameer Shaheed (Shaheed 2021) provides insight into the power of aesthetic engagement: “Aesthetic engagement invites modes of attention, perception, and understanding that complement and go beyond what is commonly understood by ‘rational reasoning’”. Shaheed takes us into the realm of what Augusto Boal refers to as the oneiric¹ properties of the “aesthetic space”, the power to evoke memory and to imagine.

Dramatic action therefore releases the emotional, physical, and mental potential contained in the ‘Actor’, the synergetic relations between these provide a strong base for what Gergen and Gergen (2014) term as new forms of life, “Theories about human action can be enormously consequential in human affairs. As we take on their constructions of our character, our potentials, our motives, and so on, we can be drawn into new forms of life.” The investigation of human affairs through dramatic action is magnified when ‘others’, ‘mirror’ and embody one another in the aesthetic space and reevaluate their own social constructions. Yoo (2021) describes empathy as actual embodiment, “To understand is to imaginatively enter the bodily experiences of others and to become accountable to their suffering.”

The innovative research and practice-based process and some of its practical applications which I will describe, have developed through my practice and research in the past twenty or so years, it has been applied in contact situations involving: incarcerated men and women and theatre students; management and workers; Arabs and Jews; racially diverse students in the U.S.; mixed ethnicity groups in the far east; the physically emotionally and cognitively disabled and more.

My research paradigm recognizes the potential of the aesthetic space to enable 'actors' to reframe their constructions of reality (Berger & Luckman, 1991), and that of the ‘theatre aspect’, as a catalyst that challenges ‘actors’ to deconstruct through play and later reconstruct, attitudes and identities. This process bridges gaps based on prejudiced ideas and allows 'actors' to modify their conceptions of 'self' and 'other' through becoming mutually significant others' to one another.

Applying dialogue through drama skills in the workplace, school, social and healing situations enables dialogue across hierarchies to invoke a broad range of opportunities for empowerment, dialogue, and reconciliation also inducing indirect therapeutic benefits for participants. These benefits are achieved synergistically by placing the psychodynamic intergroup process in the creative-dramatic space.

¹ Oneiric – of or belonging to dreams. (Boal, 1995:18)

The power of dramatic play to enable **self-disclosure** and **perspective-taking** requires creating a safe working environment. This is achieved with the use of theatre games, and providing an 'as if' (Stanislavski 1982) playacting space, which allows distancing using make-belief and metaphor to reduce anxiety. Empathy is heightened by 'seeing' others without judgment and beyond their stereotypes or 'demons', and thus deconstructing 'old' learned prejudicial attitudes and behavior in search of 'new' remodified attitudes and behavior.

The efficacy of the model has been examined in relation to its two stages, **process** (the workshop) and **product** (the dramatic performance) in light of three questions:

1. How do the processes unique to this CBT model, and the quality of dialogue the 'actors' conduct with 'others', contribute to changes in one's awareness and behavior?
2. How do the creative experience and the challenge of performing in front of an 'audience', serve as a catalyst in the participants' personal development?
3. Can **long-term** participation in a process based on CBT disciplines, in a group made up of polarized entities; bring a marked change in the individuals' biased perceptions? And induce change in attitudes, behavior, values, and points of view in both the short term and over time?

The following observations, examples, and findings should help shed light on and provide practical and applicable thoughts on these questions.

III. findings and observations

I will describe three applications of the *contact in the aesthetic space* model, interracial, business, and work with people with disabilities, in subjective auto-ethnographic qualitative terms and elaborate more broadly, using data from questionnaires and interviews, on conflict 'resolution' through a project with Arab and Jewish students at the Western Galilee College campus. Interestingly the process being analyzed tends to dictate the research paradigm and methodology that best describes it.

Investigating interracial relations in the Aesthetic space - The Drew University project

The participants of The Theatre in the Community class at Drew University New Jersey, January through March 2009, opened up and reflected on a multitude of diverse identities; White American, African-American, Haitian-American, Latino, Jewish, Christian, Homosexual, Straight, Bisexual and more. The workshop produced improvisations and written texts which were shaped into a performance staged in various locations on campus, and followed by facilitated discussions.

The participating cohort was made up of theatre students and students of African and minority studies. This project, over fifty years after Allport, faced the same issues of prejudice outlined in Allport's *The Nature of Prejudice* where he outlined the *intergroup contact hypothesis*. The project at Drew was innovated using dramatic performative practice.

Working with polarized groups is far more complex than placing two stereotypes one opposite the other. A group being made up of subgroups and individuals of many kinds, and the relationships within it being both interpersonal and intergroup.

Students registered for the course not really understanding the complexity of what they were entering. Diversity courses on campus are usually academic, describing phenomena but avoiding discussion and emotional involvement. The Drew workshop became extremely emotional at times with outbursts of crying and anger, for placing them in compromising situations, directed at the facilitators, myself a guest facilitator and Dr. Lisa Brenner the class professor.

It has become evident, as analyzing the following processes will show, that the *intergroup contact in the aesthetic space* process also instigates indirect therapeutic outcomes by providing 'actors' with a 'reverse therapeutic' journey. The *intergroup contact in the aesthetic space* process provides a safe and graduated process where

participants make their own ‘therapeutic program’ by adopting theatrical conventions including fictional characters **me-not me**, and role reversal, to create distance while enacting real life tensions ‘on stage’ as it were, and later by self-disclosure in a verbal reflective setting.

Allport posits four conditions for affecting attitude change through intergroup contact:

- 1) **Equal Status:** both groups are taken into an equal status relationship – this is achieved by adopting a new category ‘actors’.
- 2) **Common Goals (Cooperative activity):** both groups work on a problem/task and share this as a common goal, sometimes called a *superordinate goal* - In the dramatic space the goal is to work together to create theatrical vignettes to be experienced and reflected upon. In full scale projects the *superordinate* challenge, the ‘common goal’ is put to the test by staging a performance in front of a live audience.
- 3) **Intergroup Cooperation:** the task must be structured so that individual members of both groups are interdependent on each other to achieve this common goal - Theatre being a form of social art requires teamwork and commitment.
- 4) **Social Norms:** support of authority (Law or Custom) that both groups acknowledge and defined social norms that support the contact and interactions between the groups and members - theatrical activity requires participants to be ‘inter-actors’, the performed result whether within the workshop or as a staged event requires adherence to the ‘social norms’ defined and agreed upon by the group members.

Chris and Sherell, theatre students at Drew University in New Jersey, participated in an *intergroup contact in the aesthetic space* workshop in 2009. Chris, (a white homosexual man) and Sherell’s (a practicing Christian African American woman), close friendship was tested by confrontational exercises in the workshop. Moving from non-fiction to fiction, from workshop and discussion to staged performance, enabled the two ‘actors’ to contest their conflicted ideologies and finally to maintain their friendship.

The following excerpts from monologues from the performance “D... University”, written by Chris and Sherell inspired by the process, illustrate a multilayered complexity in their relationship, and the power of the activity in the dramatic space to evoke truth and enable unmasked empathy in concurrence with Allport’s assumption that contact and acquaintance make for friendliness.

Sherell: (Emotions for the Unspoken) “Yeah, I guess I never told you. I never thought it had anything to do with my friendship with you. Now you’re talking about a bunch of laws I don’t think I understand or never heard of before. You claim that you don’t understand how I want you to be happy if I would take away your right to be married. You can’t seem to face the fact that me wanting happiness for you runs deeper than your sexual preference or gay marriage.”

Chris: “Wait! I didn’t even know you were that religious. I mean you always think you’ll hear stuff like, ‘I think you’re going to hell!’ from some old Midwest cowboy minister—you know the kind that runs around screaming “GOD HATES FAGS!”—But that’s not you [...] Just two days ago you were teaching me how to make my booty clap.”

The two monologues were performed one after the other while the ‘antagonist was in the ‘frame’ behind the protagonist. The surreal framing of the scene presents the ‘antagonist’ witnessing the others’ monologue while standing in the background. The scene culminates in the two ‘protagonists’ spontaneously hugging each other in the presence of an audience (this happened in the first exposure to an audience and was adopted as part of the performance thereafter). The ‘framing’ depicts ‘aware-reconciliation’, indicating that the interpersonal can allow both sides to ‘agree to disagree’ even though their ideologies remain conflicted, or in Sherell’s words; “Understand me as you want me to understand you.”

Fiske et al. (2002) in a study on *A Model of (Often Mixed) Stereotype Content* refer to the terms *Competence* and *Warmth* relating to perceived status and competition. Analysis of the above monologues exemplifies the ‘often mixed’ aspect, the mutual warmth and appreciation of one another’s competencies previous to the workshop, enable

them to get through the acute stereotype differences that have been unearthed and have led to much discomfort during the workshop. The ‘Theater aspect’, while examining the place, role, and status of participants in the two-group process, reduces through ‘play’ the polarization gap between the two groups by dismantling the dissonance and conceptualizing it on an axis ranging between emotion and desire, closeness warmth and competence and judgmentalism on a categorical basis. (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu 2002)

The play “D... University”, moved out of the theatre space and into the university restaurant area where it was performed to a spontaneous audience of students and faculty. Other students began to respond in casual conversation with the performers about racial and other forms of discrimination and injustice on campus, Chris shared that member of the basketball team expressed their apologies for homophobic behavior.

Following are comments by the participants captured in a documentary made several months after the play closed, reflect the meaningfulness of the process for its participants.

- *It's something that bettered me as a person and I think that if everyone at Drew campus should adopt it... I think that it would make us more unified and open minded.*
- *It made me just want to open up even more, to learn more about other people.*
- *The work is something that needs to continue, it should not die down, and were going to tackle the big issues and bring them out to the forefront, we've laid the foundations, it's up to us to continue and I hope the class continues and we can just continue and commence.*
- *I feel really proud people still talk about it.*
- *We created all of this and it was to change the campus, to affect people, to make an impact and I really wish I could work like that again.*
- *I wish I was still in it, I wish I could go every day, because I'm terrified that I'm going to forget what I learned, I don't think I will because it's huge, I don't ever want to stop learning about people the way I learned about them in that time.*

These responses substantiate the assumptions that ‘**long-term** participation in a process based on CBT disciplines, in a group made up of polarized entities; can bring a marked change in the individuals’ biased perceptions, and induce change in attitudes, behavior, values, and points of view in both the short term and over time.

However, as meaningful as processes of self-awareness can be for the participants, receiving the support of the organization or institution can be a challenge. As expressed by Chris: *There was such a charge at the end it felt like ‘ok stuff’s going to happen’ were going to make this happen, things are going to change were going to try to continue, someone’s going to pick it up, the administration has seen us... and not to be pessimistic, but I feel like it’s ‘ok we’ve had our moment but let’s just let things lie because that’s easier’.*

Investigating inter and intra institutional relations in the Aesthetic space - Business theatre

Companies that invest in performing arts-based training can improve their business performances. (Claudio Baccarani and Angelo Bonfanti 2016)

Between the years 2000-2003, I was a partner in a Business Theatre enterprise where we performed theatre intervention, with a troupe of actor-facilitators, mainly based on *Forum Theatre* technique in a large number of companies and organizations in Israel (the venues included Intel, the Israeli military, banks, insurance companies, medical companies, hospitals and more). We tackled issues ranging from defining company values, unraveling conflicts between management and workers to tensions experience by fighter pilots’ wives and dilemmas of young officers having to evacuate Jewish settlement from occupied Gaza.

Sheng-Tao Fan (2013) uses *Applied Theatre in Corporate training* (ATCT), as an umbrella term for the myriad of applications, from role-play through drama therapy and more in corporate settings. Fan claims ‘applied theatre in corporate training is a new concept and methodology’. Mangham (2001 in Rae 2013) notes, “Over the years [...] theatre has been regarded as a particularly powerful space for challenge, reflection and instruction”. Thus, according to Mangham, using theatre and drama as a vehicle for organizational development has become increasingly popular

in organizations, whether hiring professional actors to support skills development or, more recently, using drama to address wider organizational issues, such as diversity, bullying, and harassment or conflict management through the use *forum theatre*.

The business Theatre model I will present based on Augusto Boal's *Forum Theatre* adapted for the corporate setting. Raye sights Coopey and Burgoyne who claim that "through offering a metaphorical learning space coupled with an actual performance space, forum theatre interventions should offer the workforce opportunities to engage with the management in addressing organizational issues." (Coopey and Burgoyne 2000). The portrayal of a supposedly fictional character, allows for expressing feelings that would otherwise be suppressed in a hierarchical corporate situation. When in the the *aesthetic space*, participants tend to embrace the dramatic 'stage' as a *neutral zone*, and by embodying *fictional*² characters in an improvised drama, often evoking humour, defenses are dropped and disputed issues tackled in a relatively safe manner.

The convention *We are play-acting*, provided a platform for management, middle management, and shopfloor workers at Silora R&D³, to confront internal issues in a three-month workshop that culminated in a forum theatre 'performance'. Silora R&D employees, in collaboration with theatre students from Western Galilee College, developed two metaphorical scenes: *R&D surrogate mothering* and *Hospital for the deranged*. The audience, company employees, was active in unraveling the conflicts raised by joining in actively on stage as characters in the scene presented, and acting out their solutions to the conflict presented and thus, the performance space becomes a metaphorical learning space for the organization.

Coopey and Burgoyne are aware that this approach may conflict with management perceptions of where legitimate control 'sits', typified by the reluctance of employers to consult and involve staff in organizational decisions. According to them, in reality "people are denied space in which they can take risks in improvising aspects of self and social relationships whenever they have few opportunities to make useful contributions to decisions that affect them" (Coopey and Burgoyne, 2000 in Rae 2013). Contrary to this observation, Silora R&D, embraced the opportunity for the employees to contribute to decisions that affect them.

The scene *Hospital for the Deranged*, was written by a company employee in response to issues raised in the business theatre workshop. The scene centered around a middle manager, the ward doctor, forcing the head nurse to administer the wrong medication to a patient, and this despite her protestations. The wrong medication created an adverse reaction and havoc in the ward. The head nurse was blamed for the mistake and subsequently fired by the hospital administrator.

Head Nurse Norma: listen Betty, patient Miriam needs to get her medication at 16:00, I couldn't find her protocol but Dr. Oded said it's the same dose patient Boris gets... get going...

Nurse Betty: Are you sure Norma? I'm not sure...

Head Nurse Norma: Oded said... there's work to be done...

Patient Miriam: (Betty trying to administer the medication) No! No! I don't want this medicine... I'm scared...

Nurse Betty: sweetheart, there is no time for this... you're not the only patient... take your medicine it'll be ok.

Patient Leah: Always the same! Always the same! (Miriam has an acute allergic reaction) look she can't breathe!

Following the performance of the Forum Theatre scene, the audience, whom Boal terms *spect-actors* is then asked to seek justice for protagonist, in this case nurse Norma, who obviously was pushed into a corner, thus unwillingly making a mistake and paying the price in place of her superior. Members of the audience are then invited to actively

² The *neutral zone*, even when the character closely concurs with the individual portraying it, permits behavior to be modified, situations and relationships to be reinvented, allowing investigation of real conflict situation in an 'as if' non-fictional scene.

³Silora R&D. provides state of the art multimedia and switching solution systems to leading companies in the AV market.

take the nurse's place and try to resist the hierarchical oppression. The 7-minute vignette becomes a 'battleground', where company employees try to resist the system, applying different tactics and reasoning. The battle is over when the audience accepts a just solution presented by one of their own, a spect-actor, this is usually marked by an outburst of support and clapping.

Hospital for the Deranged was performed again at a conference on *Leadership in the Age of Innovation* at the School of Management at Western Galilee College in 2015, to an audience of professionals and academics from local industries. The stage became a jolly arena with spect-actors of all levels of floor and management, secretaries and bosses taking the stage and offering solutions in role, attempting to save the nurse from her fate and the company from shame.

Intergroup dialogue in the aesthetic space - Theatre students and people with disabilities

"All real living is meeting" Martin Buber

Petra Kuppers (Kuppers 2015) quotes Paul Longmore, a history professor and disability activist, "*All of us, disabled and nondisabled alike, will never truly understand disability experiences and identities unless we examine what we think we know. We all have a lot of relearning to do.*"

Meeting in the aesthetic space, in an *I-thou* relationship (Buber 1958), forces us to see one another eye to eye, body to body, thus reexamining ourselves through the prism of the other. May, a student who participated in a nine-month *intergroup contact in the aesthetic space* workshop with people with disabilities writes in response to the Longmore quote above:

Unfortunately, until the course, I didn't get to work with or even have contact with someone who was considered disabled. [...] My knowledge began and ended with the information I gathered throughout my life without really delving into the subject.

The moment I came face to face with those 'disabled people', everything I had learned, heard, and thought I knew disappeared, and I was left worried and scared about the process. I was enveloped by a sense of general uncertainty. I was afraid to hurt, I was afraid to unintentionally belittle, and I went to great lengths to relate to the disabled members of the group while ignoring their disabilities. It wasn't long before I discovered that they themselves were unwilling to ignore, deny or set aside their disability. I was happy to discover that most of them are even proud of who they are and their personal overcoming of obstacles despite their disabilities. I discovered that there is no normal person. The norm was dictated to us from infancy but can also be interpreted personally.

Eventually, I realized that I could not have gone through the process in its entirety and experienced it in depth without honestly and genuinely acknowledging my prejudices about people with disabilities. As we got to know each other, I felt that we were all going through a process of 'de-demonization' (Harris, 2012). This was actually the starting point that allowed them to be seen beyond their disability and for me to see them as individual and complete people.

For the past two years, I have facilitated community-based theatre projects involving 'apparently' non-disabled theatre students together with people defined as having disabilities. The disabilities include CP, blindness, impaired sight, deafness, cognitive and others. The students in this so-called binary represent 'society', with all the fear and hesitation common in society when coming into contact with the unknown. The disabled 'actors' are hesitant about their abilities to 'perform' both in the workshop and of course on stage in front of an audience.

At first, the unequal status is very apparent; the students take on the role of 'we're here to help them' and the people with disabilities credit them with 'artist' status. One automatically imagines intergroup contact is there to empower the weaker group, those who need to be pitied, and protected. The extended workshop process that spans an entire academic year, achieves a degree of 'equal status' when the members of the 'strong group' becomes aware of their own disabilities and their earlier misconceptions about their partners, having perceived them at first as being inferior on the achievement, competence scale.

The following comments serve to describe the transformative power, for both 'categories' of participants in this intergroup contact in the aesthetic space process.

Assaf a student describes his transformation: [...] *I've learned a lot about my perception of what I don't know or feel comfortable with. Much of my interaction with people with disabilities has not ended positively for me in the past. It always gave me a feeling of unpleasantness or low status on my part. That is, it is not my place to talk to such a person about his needs and troubles. From my point of view, I'm supposed to ignore the disability, I'm supposed to make that person feel good about themselves 24/7, if I'm physically superior to him, then I need to help him. And these lines of thought are very far from reality. The cohesion and openness I felt during the process is one that is extraordinary. We got to make jokes about our "disabilities" and even decided that the theme of the show would be sex and intimacy among people with disabilities.*

We broke the glass ceiling very quickly and in a very fun and comfortable way. In addition, I will note that at the beginning of the process [...] I believed wholeheartedly that we were doing this project for them. That is, we as 'normative' people need to make the voices of the weak and different from us heard. And in practice, I realized that not only did they not need a hero or salvation, but they were also very curious and willing to present on stage what bothers us, the students.

Roa, participating in this dialogue through theatre process for the second time, is blind from birth. She is a young Bedouin woman from Rhahat in the south of Israel who lives and works independently the town where the college is in the northern part of the country: *I feel that my personal development is expressed in the fact that today I dare to challenge myself with texts and anything, I didn't think I had the courage to experience this. I learned to overcome fears. An interpersonal encounter with someone who is different allows me to learn quite a bit about them.*

Theater is a special tool for expressing emotions outward. Meeting a community, and conveying messages through play and through dialogue is a wonderful thing. This kind of community project for people with and without disabilities is an opportunity to get to know something different and unique. You literally learn what acceptance of the other is.

Meir, who is hard of hearing and reads lips, therefore, categorized disabled, has another observation that challenges us to rethink the way we categorize *people with disabilities* as belonging one group. *I forgot to mention that a person who has a disability has difficulty connecting to another disability that is different from his own. It took me a while to digest the limitation of seeing and communicating. I also learn a lot from the strengths and ways of coping with the limitations of Shai (cerebral palsy confined to a motorized wheelchair), Roa, (blind from birth) Udai (severe sight limitation, legally blind).*

Shai, who has CP and is confined to wheelchair, makes us aware of the safety in the *neutral zone* that enables him to confront issues that may otherwise be tabu to discuss in society: *participating in the project fulfilled a dream, helped me cope with everything I went through, made me want to play and write. Meeting people who are different from me allows for open and honest dialogue, and listening to things that are not always pleasant to hear. This is the power of a group to reflect and talk about complex things from an inclusive and supportive place, and together kick the audience in the gut.*

The subject of the play which will premiere on June 25th 2023, is sexuality, always a sensitive issue and especially when disabled people, often regarded as asexual, are performing.

The following dialogue is a small example of the way in which the group has chosen to use 'shock tactics' and humour, in order to drive home a message to a mixed audience of abled and disabled.

Daughter (introducing her boyfriend): Please meet ...

Dad: What's going on, man? I've heard good things about you!

Boyfriend: (nodding his head)

Dad: (suddenly notices the boyfriend's hearing aid, taking daughter aside, whispering) is he seriously listening to music with earphones when I talk to him?

Daughter: No Daddy, he's just a little deaf...

Dad: (whispering aloud) Excuse me? I didn't hear that... What do you mean a little deaf?

Daughter: You don't have to whisper... He reads lips and sign language; I'll help you don't worry.

Dad: What do you mean help me? Wait, a moment ago you said you'd met a 'knight on white horse'... looks more like an ass.

Daughter: If he's deaf then he's not the right man for me? We all have problems...

Dad: Sweetheart, it's not just a problem, it's a disability... How do you make love? Pantomime?

A performance on sexuality and disability challenges All of us, disabled and nondisabled alike to respond to the Paul Longmore quotation and *examine what we think we know*.

Intergroup dialogue in the aesthetic space - Arabs and Jews

When writing my doctoral thesis, and searching for theories by which to analyze my own practice, I became aware of Allport's *contact hypothesis* which provided a theoretical structure by which I could analyze my practice *Intergroup contact in the aesthetic space*.

The book edited by Rabah Halabi's *Dialogue between Identities, Arab Jewish encounter at Wahat al-Salam/ Neve Shalom*⁴, Maps out the Neve Shalom School for Peace contact model. Halabi points out two approaches to intergroup contact: The interpersonal or psychological approach, the focus being mainly on the psychological aspects of the encounter experience, the objective of the encounter according to this approach is to emphasize the commonalities between participants and marginalize the conflictual issues, and the Intergroup approach which stresses group identity and confronting the conflicts represented by each national group. 'In our meetings between Jews and Arabs, the emphasis is on conflict, and we treat participants as representing their group identities. This is an approach that is not identical to any of the approaches presented, but constitutes a model that we have developed over the years' (Halabi 2006). Halabi's approach concurs with the methods I have adapted over the years facilitating several projects dealing actively-theatrically with the charged relationship between Arab/Palestinian Israeli citizens and Jewish Israeli citizens.

The project which I will describe, facilitated together with Ms. Dalia Schade, a facilitation model consisting of male and female, Arab and Jew, took place at Western Galilee college in 2021-2022. The population of Western Galilee is mixed, approximately half belonging to Arab-Palestinian culture (Muslim, Christian, Druz, and Bedouin) and half Jewish, the same applies to the student body at Western Galilee College, where theatre studies students from both cultures, along with several other students from other programs, participated in the project. The process entailed creating a presentation from authentic materials that arose in the workshop process. The show "Be in my shoes" premiered in June 2022.

Given the intrinsic conflict between the two national groups, tensions rise and fluctuate. This is especially true during times of heightened conflict such as the Israeli Palestinian crisis and Israel's military campaign "Guardian of the walls" that took place in May 2021, which escalated to war in Gaza and violent protests.

In her book "Dialogue on Campus – Jews and Arabs sharing a common space" (2018), Ariella Friedman concludes that Israel lacks of a model for shared co-existence and therefore one is faced daily with problematic situations dilemmas and questions. Halabi too recognizes the limitations of the encounter to offer a broad solution for mutual co-existence, and therefore "we set ourselves the goal of expanding the awareness and identity of the participants".

Some of the preliminary indicators from my research of the Community Theatre project that took place in the 2021-22 academic year, concur with the inferences of Friedman and Halabi, but due to the unique context of my project some of my findings contradict these. I will illustrate these with examples from the script of the play, interviews with two participants and before and after 'attitude' questionnaires.

⁴ Neve Shalom is a village of Palestinian and Jewish citizens of Israel dedicated to building justice, peace and equality in the country and the region.

The intergroup contact in the aesthetic space process raised poignant questions of identity and belonging that reflected the problematic conditions Friedman and Halabi point out. Added to the above difficulties there was a critical breakdown in relations around operation “Guardian of the walls”, where each side barricaded itself behind extreme ideological identities.

This community-based theatre experiential model endeavors to acquaint participants their values, beliefs, norms, and behavior patterns of “others”. The experience takes place simultaneously on two levels: the social dynamic, and the theatrical; The students encounter themselves, their opinions, and worldview through the encounter with others, in a process in which their worldview is dismantled and reassembled along with attitudes towards self and other.

Working on “Be in my shoes”, the creative process was interrupted by the Al-Aqsa riots and Operation Guardian of the Walls in May 2022, which led to the shutdown of studies at the college. During the stoppage, the Department of Theater Studies faculty and the students participated in charged conversations in Zoom meetings in an attempt to initiate an attentive dialogue and provide space for students to ventilate and express themselves, this was only partially successful but at least we were talking to one another.

With the resumption of studies, work on the play resumed, the meetings were charged and accompanied by verbal confrontations and lively conversations in the rehearsal room, which included questions about continuing to work together and staging the play, which obviously touched from the outset on questions of identity and belonging of Jews and Palestinians in the State of Israel. The difficult group conversations often ended with intense personal conversations and hugs. The students took it upon themselves to continue staging the play as planned.

The play *Be in My Shoes* opened in June 2022 and was performed several times, followed by discussions with the audience. The current study is based on attitude questionnaires at the beginning and end of the process, audience questionnaires, semi-structured interviews with the participants, and recordings from the process including the arguments that accompanied it, the dramatic text, and video footage of the play. The ‘Barbeque scene’ from “Be in my shoes”, crystallizes the complexity of the Palestinian-Jewish issue. Three ‘attitudes’ confront one another on a national holiday – Israeli Independence day, that has opposing relevance to either side. The scene was created using an exercise named *stupid cupid*, where cupid, the emissary, has to convey messages back and forth between the two opposing ‘beliefs’ in an attempt to advance understanding and bring them together. Bartal and Raviv in their book “The Comfort Zone of a Disputed Region” (2021) claim that although both sides in the dispute have concrete demands and experiences most characteristics and beliefs are based on psychological perceptions and attitudes. Their claim is that an internal social change will be possible, but it is contingent on their being a peace process. However, at the same time they urge that people keep striving for dialogue and don’t lose hope.

The three characters in the scene are ‘representative’ of beliefs held by the different ‘tribes’ in the Israeli population. Ellie obviously is in the almost impossible role of ‘stupid cupid’. The monologues from which the excerpts that follow were taken, are personal affidavits based on the experience of the actors themselves, moments of reality within a fictional scene.

(Three characters barbecuing)

Ellie: Fun hey?

Sarah: Independence... Barbecuing...

Ellie: Yes, we all grill together, we Israelis love to grill, all of us... (sings) One people with one heart...

Fatima: I'm actually a Palestinian too...

Ellie: Arab!

Sarah: So, you're celebrating with us?

Fatima: Of course not!... I'm not celebrating... If I grill, do I celebrate? It's food for my kids.

Ellie: What do you mean? Aren't you celebrating?

Fatima: Your independence, but this is our Nakba, the disaster to me...

Ellie: (To Sarah) This is their Nakba, the disaster...

Sarah: That's what they say... What disaster? What hasn't she got here?

Eli: (to Sarah) So, you don't believe what happened during the Nakba?

Sarah: That's what they say... Are you protecting her?

Ellie: I'm just explaining... For us, Independence Day is a happy day, a holiday for the establishment of the Jewish state, but there is a minority here for whom the day of the establishment of the state also includes pain and sorrow... I say... We are all people, we all live here, today is a festive day... (to Fatima) are from Acre?

Fatima: Akka! (Arabic pronunciation)

Sarah: Acre! I'm from Acre too.

Ellie: (referring to Fatima's BBQ) A lot of smoke you have there...

Sarah: Yes, the smoke is all on us...

Fatima: So go away then! ... it's not your place anyway...

Ellie: Hold on... this place is for all of us...

Sarah: Really? Are you saying all of us too?

Fatima: Yours... And mine... Before you, I am a citizen just like you.

Analysis of the attitude questionnaires answered by the students at the beginning and towards the end of the process indicates that:

- It appears that in most aspects of self-image, and the confidence to express oneself there is a slight increase in reports at the end of the year compared to the beginning.
- There are increasing reports that conflict is an opportunity for growth, that if there is no dialogue, violence will continue, and that Arabs and Jews should be partners in promoting a just and prosperous society.
- Reports that dialogue between Jewish and Arab students at the college will deepen their friendship, and their partnership remains very high.
- There has been a decline in reports of close relations and acquaintances between Arab and Jewish students at the beginning of the year compared to the end of the year. However, between 80-85% report that there is a good chance they will have friends from the other group.

- Students seem to report a decrease in agreement regarding their understanding of the other side of the conflict and the possibility of seeing a degree of justice and logic in the other side's positions before participating in the workshop versus at its end.
- It seems that at the end of the year, students feel more at peace with their identity and less need to blur or suppress it.
- Students report before and after, an extreme lack of knowledge about the Jewish-Palestinian conflict.

These findings are more optimistic than Halabi's conclusions, who in recognition of the limitations of the encounter to offer a broad solution for mutual co-existence, sets the goal of expanding the awareness and identity of the participants. Although it is evident that students feel more whole with their identity, it is also apparent from the *intergroup contact in the aesthetic space* process, that students on both sides feel that if there is no dialogue, violence will continue and that Arabs and Jews should be partners in promoting a just and prosperous society. Developing friendships across the cultures is a phenomenon I am aware of in our theatre studies department through personal acquaintance and observation of our students. This may be explained in a number of ways: 1. The process described here cannot be disconnected from the context, the theatre studies program at Western Galilee is a three-year B.A. program during which the students experience multiple interactions. 2. In discussions with the students from Arab culture one becomes aware that they belong to a generation that is transitioning from their parents' conservative norms to a culture that is influenced by the prevailing "Hebrew-Jewish" culture and by global norms and media that affect all young people today. Thus, becoming closer to their Jewish friends in tastes and values. One also wonders how different the findings would be had this process not taken place at a time of the aforementioned 'national' crisis.

The excerpts from the personal monologues performed within the barbecue scene as 'asides' directed at the audience, make salient the extremes of the confrontation. Audience responses were equal but opposite, the Jewish audience felt the play was biased in favour of the Arabs and vice versa.

Interviews with the participants some months after the project ended, help to substantiate the findings from the questioners. I shall illustrate this by juxtaposing two monologues representing opposing views about national identities and quotations from the interviews with both participants:

- **Ali's monologue:** *Don't forget..., that your Independence Day, means the final declaration of the non-existence of an entire nation, a nation with values and memories with stories and love. I'm a Palestinian resident of the state, I didn't choose to be a citizen of a regime that chose to build above life that was here before.*

My children Fatma and Mahmoud, there is nothing more Arab than that, they are from the village of Manshiya, my grandfather's house is still there, they are entitled to at least one piece of land, but they will live their lives without really belonging to the place. I choose the path of solidarity, of communication and speech, of togetherness, I don't want to throw you Jews into the sea... Never... On the contrary, I am willing to marry you. But I do not forgive or forget, and I will teach my children that as long as the government does not recognize the injustice done to my grandparents, as long as the language is a language of war and occupation, inequality and racism... Let them not forgive, let them not forget, and teach their children not to forget.

Ali's interview below strengthens the finding regarding identity, self-image and self-confidence and being able to express himself freely 'The college gave me this stage and it's an opportunity... ', even within his monologue one can identify a call for dialogue he expresses as "I choose the path of solidarity [...] I am willing to marry you".

Ali from his interview: *We were able to put things on the table? To recognize me, to recognize me as a citizen, as an Arab, with rights, to recognize me as a Palestinian Arab and I emphasize, I am a Palestinian Arab in every respect, because this is how my grandmothers are born, and my parents are born, and this is how I was raised and this is how I will educate my children to educate their children. The fact that I live in the State of Israel, because there was a certain occupation in 48 and 67, does not mean that I can forget my identity – a Palestinian Arab in every respect.*

The college gave me this stage and it's an opportunity I didn't get even in the places I've been in all the years as an actor for the past 20 years, even in the Acre Theater. They didn't give me this big platform to come and say my stuff, the college here did.

- **Shira's monologue:** *Who can promise me that they won't rise up against me with knives? And then say, we told you, it written on the wall. I'm tired of both sides! I'm tired of the word occupation! I'm tired of knives! I'm tired of feeling like I have to apologize for living on Israeli soil... It belongs to your grandfather just as it is to my grandfather who planted an oak tree on the edge of Mount Arbel, which stands proudly, looking down at the settlements, the paved roads, the children, the travelers... Yes, there was a war here, a war of blood, a war of pain, people ran away, people cried, fathers buried sons and sons buried fathers. But can you to tell me that if you were persecuted and killed, you wouldn't fight back? Sometimes I wonder how things would be if the situation were reversed, how we Jews would live here under Arab rule... Palestinian... It's hard for me to be optimistic... Your Nakba is the joy of my great grandmother, who lost faith in every living being when she saw her family fall into their grave pits during the Holocaust, and decided to travel a long way on an illegal immigrant ship, because this is where she believed, here the independence of the Jewish people begins, and here we will grow up and love and return to a quiet life without persecution and without threats. Because of what my great-grandmother went through, I'm willing to stand up and fight in front of the whole world and shout "I am a Jew!", until I fall and I no longer have the strength to scream. I'm proud, I love being Jewish, it flows through my body, blood, spirit, and my heart explodes with pride when I say, "I am a Jew!"*

Shira from her interview: *I know what they are experiencing and what they are coming from... the Arab side, I know I'm Jewish but I still think we should have known a little more, more to know about the other side. I was very honest and provocative and I said what I felt and with them I felt that they kept their place, they didn't let me be fully exposed to what they think of us or what they think of me or the connections that exist within the class. They were careful, I didn't feel that I was careful in the process, in the end people appreciated me, talked to me, opened up to me even if it was after the process. I felt much closer to certain people in the class (Arab students) than my natural close group, closer to people who dared to stand in front of me, to open up and express their opinions, like Majdolin, Abir, Daniel, the only one with whom I didn't seem to have a conversation was Ali, he remained in his position and I was in my position and really distant. today I feel appreciated more for my honesty, even if it doesn't match theirs.*

Shira, relating in retrospect ratifies the credibility of the intergroup method of contact as being more effective for the purpose of intergroup dialogue than the interpersonal. It appears that by standing up for her beliefs she has gained the respect of her adversaries and nurtured good interpersonal relations, and has established relationships based on both 'warmth' and 'competence'. Her comment about lack of knowledge about the 'other side' concurs with the findings from the questionnaire. Her interview brings to awareness the inequality between in and out groups, although they share a creative space and classroom and develop friendships of sorts, "with them I felt that they kept their place they didn't let me be fully exposed to what they think of us [...] They were careful." Shira's observation challenges Allport's first condition for intergroup contact - Equal Status: both groups are taken into an equal status relationship, classically outgroups internalize oppression and therefore *They were careful*. My claim that this can be achieved by adopting a new category 'actors', is only partially achievable when dealing with conflict that is related to territory, apartheid, occupation and interracial conflict.

IV.CONCLUSION

The four groups sighted in this article show the diversity and complexity of the *intergroup contact in the aesthetic space* model, although the simple binary relates to two groups with different cultural beliefs and values in a contact situation, analysis of these four processes indicates a more complex set of inter-personal and intergroup interactions.

Responding to the three questions regarding the efficacy of the process, it becomes apparent that every ingroup outgroup dynamic is very different.

At Drew, the students report a desire to continue ‘the work’, this can be viewed as an indication of satisfaction from the process, even though there were difficult discoveries and emotional responses that the participants perceived as impossible to resolve when they occurred. In this case it is fair to say that their meaningful achievement, a performance that had an impact on the college community, played an important role in the positive outcomes, changing awareness and personal development, and hopefully long-term biased perceptions have been challenged.

At Silora R&D, management were open to a critical encounter. When asked to perform at the conference on *Leadership in the Age of Innovation*, there was willingness on behalf of both the ‘actors’ and company management. This is encouraging, especially in light of Coopey and Burgoyne’s awareness that ‘this approach may conflict with management perceptions of where legitimate control ‘sits’.

The dialogue between the ‘normative’ students as it were and people with disabilities, was not easy at first for the students, as May has related as not having contact previously with anyone who is disabled. However, Meir’s insight about himself, a deaf person, finding it problematic at first to relate to people with disabilities different to his own, awakened me to the fact that I was stereotyping ‘people with disabilities’ as one group. There are indications that change in attitudes, behavior, values, and points of view in both the short term and over time can be expected for all participants in this group.

The challenge to be able to see one another eye to eye in a charged political binary is complex. However, it seems from the responses and considering the three-year college interdependency between the students in creating and working together that there is room, despite all the impediments, for hope.

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