

## **TAU Fellowship Research Report**

Name of Fellow: **Janine Lewis**

Group 7

### **1. Title of project**

Embodied performance towards collaborative practice and Augmented Reality (AR)

### **2. Rationale**

This project has been designed as a practice-based innovation to enhance teaching and learning within the arts. One of the intended outcomes will be the development of teaching and learning materials which may be used to strengthen collaborative practice and transformative teaching. This individual project was bolstered by the group objective to develop a trans-disciplinary approach to materials development through a common and cohesive conceptual framework. This framework foregrounded the primary four pillars of innovative teaching and learning: self-regulation and self-efficacy; co-creating new knowledge; co-creating an improved future; and meaningful reflection.

This project is located within the performing arts, where inclusive collaborative practice is pursued through theatre-making. Theatre is a collaborative form of fine art which uses live performers to present the experience of a real or imagined event before a live audience in a specific place – utilizing the body in space and time. The performers may communicate this experience to the audience through combinations of gesture, speech, song, music, and dance. Elements of design and art are used to enhance the physicality, presence and immediacy of the experience. In theatre-making, the artistic ambitions are inter-disciplinary and the understanding of theatre is performance rather than literature-oriented.

This project is envisaged to incorporate three phases. The first phase is applicable to the outcomes of TAU programme and is detailed in this report. In this phase, the project was designed to team students together to produce a site-specific performance that simultaneously explores aspects of diversity and transformation, as well as performative aspects (body, space and time). Augmented Reality (AR) digital renditions of the performances as artefacts will remain as digital footprints at/of the sites – graffiti taglines on the site.

### **3. Purpose**

The purpose of this project is to investigate and develop the concept of augmented reality in embodied performative learning as an innovative means to generate site-specific physical theatre-making, as a means to stimulate inter/transdisciplinary collaborative teaching and learning.

#### **4. Background and motivation**

Physical theatre-making looks to utilize the physical body in time and space to create meaning and conceptual performance. At the heart of the physical theatre-making process and product(ion) is the embodied performance as non-verbal communication. Hackney (2002, p. 45) states that "body movement is not a symbol of expression; it is expression". One of the conceptual processes I include as a module for senior drama students (who have had compulsory movement training in their undergraduate studies) is conceptual site-specific performance and theatre-making.

In the drama programme at TUT, all teaching and learning in the physical theatre courses are designed through iterative practice and modules are customized to the current group. As both the space and the performer have been transformed through the performances, over the years I have seen a desire to adapt this site-specific module to leave a remnant of the site-specific performance rituals as commentary on and in the spaces. This has led to exploring with Augmented Reality (AR) technology in 2014 where students were invited to make a digital recording of their performances in the chosen spaces and to leave triggers to be digitally accessed by whoever visits the space at another time. The intention is to offer an ephemeral, conceptual or metaphoric view of the space as a gift to the new visitor.

My own auto-ethnographic performance art practice has led me to realize that these performances in site-specific spaces are transformative for both performer and space, offering an opportunity for emotional expression for meaning-making and healing. This is achieved through embodied performance and embodied space(s). Within the course, after the initial introduction to and individualistic applications of site-specific performance, a topic is given to the group as a starting point for students to grapple with and find an appropriate space to create and express their collaborative performances. Identity was the topic given for the initial exploration in 2014 that, along with the designated groupings, encouraged critical thinking about the student's perception of transformation in the/ir current circumstances. This additional outcome was fortuitous and has led to the development of the exploratory enquiry: can this embodied performance be transformative as an innovative approach to cross-discipline collaborative practice within the arts?

Specifically, within the drama programme undergraduate students are thrust into a multi-cultural environment where mother-tongue performance, ensemble and collaborative creative processes are prevalent; this is done in the context of understanding the vocational requirements for a performer/actor in theatre-making practice. Transformation is a secondary outcome resultant from the activities and not the primary focus of all the designed activities. Other indirect outcomes include: communication, time management, diplomacy, and tolerance. While this has been perceived as being successful due to the range and topics the students elect for their individual projects, these projects have also revealed a need to directly connect with topics such as code-

switching, gender, and cultural diversity; that are now being brought to the forefront as foci and explicit topics for applied performances in courses.

The focus of the training primarily within the drama programme and reflected in most courses in the Faculty of Art TUT is strongly praxis and project driven, where intuitive, visceral, and experiential methods lead to and ground the cognitive understanding. Students arrive in the courses already with an inherent talent, creativity and/or performance abilities.

### **5. Critical Question underpinning the enquiry**

The question asked for this enquiry is: Can embodied learning/performance/space(s) be transformative as an innovative approach to interdisciplinary collaborative practice within the arts?

### **6. Review of relevant literature including some indication of the theoretical/conceptual framework/s relevant to the study.**

Various Euro-American theatre approaches employ the human mind and body as dichotomies of one another and few encourage the synthesis of the two in current actor training programs worldwide (Kemp, 2012, p. 2; Halliburton, 2002, p. 1123; Jayasinghe, 2003, p. 601; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, pp. 16-17). According to Doy (2005, p. 2), the notion of a disengaged mind and body acting/performing approach was originally formulated by French philosopher and mathematician, Rene Descartes who identified the mind superior from the physical body, including all knowledge observed through physical sensations such as sight, smell, touch and hearing. Descartes mind and body dualism formulated a "disembodied" view of individuality, rather than an embodied individuality. This notion suggests a separation between mind and body. However, Kemp (2012, p. 99) points out that cognitive science has recently discarded the either/or concept of body-mind dualism and affirmed that conceptual thought (mind) and physical activity (body) share the same neuronal pathways in the brain. Thus, the notion which advocates the separation between thought and physical expression is both inaccurate and diminishing.

The mind and body *are* interconnected (Damasio, 1994; Flacks, 2015, p. 18; Lugerling, 2013; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999, p. 3). This interconnecting phenomenon is extensively referred to as 'embodiment'. Philosopher Mark Johnson (Johnson & Rohrer, 2008, p. 23) comprehensively explains that to become conclusively embodied bodily functions (conceptual meaning, emotion and feeling) are stimulated by the external environment through the senses: hearing, smell, sight and touch. Consequently, the comprehensive product of these emotional responses produces physical symptoms such as an increased heart rate, sweaty palms and irregular breathing patterns (Kemp, 2012, p. 164; LeDoux, 1996, p. 69; Damasio, 1994, pp. 48-51). This embodied phenomenon thus suggests that the entire human organism is biologically interconnected in order to produce and stimulate emotion.

Opposed to the Euro-American influential notion that the mind and body are two separate entities, I accredit Lakoff and Johnson's (1999, p. 38) explanation that: "The mind is inherently embodied". This embodied mind hypothesis by Lakoff and Johnson suggests that the same neural systems that are engaged in bodily movements are responsible for conceptual reasoning. Thus, within a South African theatre context, it is imperative for performers influenced by Euro-American theatre ideals to understand that emotions are not primarily cognitive concepts, but a psychophysical response within the body and the mind conjointly; which in turn underpins the inherent nature of an inherent African performer.

## **7. Methodology/Methodological Orientation**

From a learning perspective, embodied and somatic learning methodologies will be employed as they support the embodied physical theatre-making performance initiative.

Physical theatre and explicitly site-specific performance, offers a participatory movement-based approach that deals more with the direct translation of a process or concept into movement. Lerman (Schenck, 2013) describes: "when you embody a process you start to realize what you *don't* understand, and you begin to ask questions because you want to get the movements right". In embodied learning, physical movement (the somatic) is the medium through which we internalize knowledge. Applied in conjunction with physical theatre-making is where the conceptual practice is externalized in/through performance. Performative principles of body, space and time apply. Therefore, this project is pragmatic in its approach to (re)designing course materials through practice-based participatory, reflective and reflexive processes.

Augmented reality (AR) is a live direct or indirect view of a physical, real-world environment whose elements are augmented (or supplemented) by computer-generated sensory input such as sound, video, graphics or GPS data. Within this project, the use of AR allows for an active participant/spectator to interact with the information/performance/activity. The Aurasma app was selected for the purpose of this project, where the auras were overlaid over the trigger images that were taken of the performance site-specific venues, and remain to be activated by any who interact with it.

## **8. Findings**

The students engaged with the performances, technology and social commentary in an adept and enthusiastic manner. On a primary level, the students demonstrated an understanding of conceptual composition in/for site-specific performance creation. They also demonstrated a keen regard for collaborative and ensemble practice.

The outputs and outcomes set out in the proposal for this project were met successfully.

OUTPUTS	
Activities	Participation
<i>what we do</i>	<i>who we reach</i>
Develop course materials	Performers = Senior drama students (3rd year)
Train site-specific performance making with senior drama students	Spectators = TUT students & staff as well as general public
Co-creation and execution of site-specific performances on TUT Arts Faculty	<i>Development Consultants:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Directorate of Teaching and Learning with Technology TUT</li> <li>• Seek support collaboration opportunities with Photography, Graphic and Multi-media students</li> </ul>
Co-create and curate online exhibition of performances	
<i>Tangibles:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conceptual essays and applied assignments of theme and performance making</li> <li>• Artefacts = AR digital renditions of live performances</li> <li>• Graphic triggers to AR platform</li> <li>• Booklet publication including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ documentation of sites and performance conceptual practice</li> <li>○ QR codes for links to online exhibition</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	

OUTCOMES - IMPACT
Phase one <i>short term</i>
Drama students co-create own learning experience
Innovative learning: inclusion of AR digital practice into site-specific performance making
Awareness and critical exploration of social issues that will remain as a digital footprint
Document embodied commentary on current social issue/s and make it available in printed and online formats

Please find as an addendum the booklet printed as a discussion of this project. Also my website is in the process of being updated, and references the flyer, booklet/brochure and the triggers that may be activated as a tangible outcome of the project. A link to the page on the site in process can be found at: <http://jlwebui-dev.azurewebsites.net/Tau>

## 9. Analysis of findings/Discussion

With regard to a larger perspective of the interdisciplinary conceptual framework designed by group 7, this project demonstrated the application of the catalysts (embodied; collaborative; transformative; and experiential) towards driving the learning experience through:

- Compassion: the theme (Identity – obviating the single story) spoke to encouraging the students to engage on a dialogical level about their current circumstances through social commentary;
- Meaningful reflection: the students were required to reflect on the theme as well as their conceptual process which brought critical understanding to the process and renewed appreciation of the theme;
- Empowerment: the students were participants in the conceptual process and therefore were encouraged to look beyond their current situation and provide commentary on it;
- Development: the students learnt and demonstrated new skills in their conceptual composition and physical theatre-making practice.

Towards the focus on the primary four pillars of practice identified for the strategy of innovative teaching and learning materials development, the following was achieved within the context of the Arts pilot project:

Self -regulation and Efficacy	Meaningful Reflection	Co-creating improved Future	Co-creating new knowledge
Students created original conceptual expressive performances that interpret the theme of identity; this subjective comment is left as a digital graffiti tag in the activated spaces	Students critically engaged with their social reality as reflection of their learning application of theatre-making; as well as the opportunity to leave a visceral comment as a tagline legacy for future generations to encounter and interpret/ponder	Students were deliberately encouraged to create in groups that disrupt their single story views on identity; this allows for collaborative conceptual practice and the generation of a shared social commentary for current and future interpretation	The use of augmented reality for the purpose of unedited site-specific performance is unique to the project as well as to the medium of teaching/learning of these alternative performance modes

## References

- Damasio, A., 1994. *Descartes Error: emotion, reason, and the human brain*. New York: Avon Books.
- Doy, G., 2005. *Picturing the self: changing views of the subject in visual culture*. London: IB Tauris & Co. Ltd.
- Flacks, N., 2015. *Acting with Passion: a performers guide to emotions on cue*. New York and London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Hackney, P., 2002. *Making connections: total body integration through Bartenief Fundamentals*. New York and London: Routledge.
- Halliburton, M., 2002. Rethinking anthropological studies of the body: Mans and Bodham in Kerala. *American Anthropologist*, 104(4), pp. 1123-1134.
- Jayasinghe, S., 2003. Mind and body split. *British Medical Journal*, 326(7389), pp. 601-602.

- Johnson, M. & Rohrer, T., 2008. An interview with Mark Johnson and Tim Rohrer: from neurons to socio-cultural situatedness. *Cognitive Linguistics Research: body, language and mind*, Volume 2, pp. 21-52.
- Kemp, R., 2012. *Embodied Acting: what neuroscience tells us about performance*. London: Routledge.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M., 1999. *Philosophy in the flesh: the embodied mind and its challenge to Western thought*. New York: Basic Books.
- LeDoux, J., 1996. *The Emotional Brain: the mysterious underpinnings of emotional life*. New York: Simon and Schuster Paperbacks.
- Lugering, M., ed., 2013. *The expressive actor: integrated voice, movement and acting training*. Canada and Oxon: Routledge.
- Schenck, L., 2013. *Embodied learning: research and thoughts*. [Online] Available at: <http://notlaura.com/embodied-learning/> [Accessed July 2016].