

**Embodied frictional artistic encounters:
The use of creativity and embodied learning as transformative and healing space/s**

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Abstract

Offered as conversations with Elmarie Costandius as reflection on practice, this article discusses the use of creative learning processes as transformative and healing space/s, and further proposes that these activation spaces be named embodied frictional artistic encounters. The construct of embodied frictional artistic encounters includes three vital participants, the artist (as creative act) as the facilitator of the immersive experience together with the spect-actor, within a designated intra-active environment. Collectively these participants collaborate to activate the artistic encounters towards a transformative and healing outcome. These communal shared intra-active space/s are heightened through affect, resonance, and wit(h)nessing, where the frictional element pertains to awakening states of doubt to alter perspective forming towards empathy. This article intends to encapsulate creative embodied learning within embodied frictional artistic encounters (ceIFAE/CELfae) and offer this as a dynamic means to classify such activations that serve to foster change and healing.

Keywords: Embodied learning, artistic encounters, arts-based, transformation

Introduction

This article is not intended as a study, to be written up as a result of formal research, but rather is offered as conversations with Elmarie, a reflection on what we have done and what it may all mean/have meant/will mean. It is deliberately crafted not to be linear because our conversations never were — we used to flit between topics and trip over one another in the conversation taking us on winding trajectories. Often rushed, as we never had much time. So, we would randomly pick up and dive in into the middle of thoughts that we left unsaid the last time. But now having had space and time, wanting to get back into deep conversation with new insights and understandings brought by lived-experience. Most possibly it is because the conversations had been started that these realisations could emerge. Perhaps this ephemeral notion excited us even more to share our spoils.



With this essence of dialogue, reminiscing, and dreaming, I attempted to pick up our conversation, and find some sort of conclusion (for now) in naming both of our explorations with art and education as encounters which hold embodied frictional artistic spaces. This paper is not written in a linear fashion, it is designed to be thought provoking, non linear, a spiral of thoughts that keep reconnecting and growing, although an attempt has been made to catch you up as a reader. It offers a sense of being deliberately fractional in its wanderings; this I hoped would add to the effect of Elmarie and me engaging sporadically yet passionately with the topic, apart and together. I attempt this offering knowing it will resonate with readers differently. Some will appreciate the convoluted nature as we explore rabbit holes and then emerge and remerge into some sort of logical connections; others will be frustrated by this, find it frictional, looking for more literal footholds. Your personal encounter with the reading may after all represent the nature of learning and creativity, giving in to experiencing the moment, and trusting the process will unfold to reveal what it should.

Establishing the context

By examining relevant literature, specific learning practices and reflexive arts-based research modes, this article makes a case for how the use of creative processes may serve as transformative learning opportunities for all participants. These activations are embodied and frictional artistic encounters that offer learning and healing space/s for the artist, spectator and the environment the activations include. This paper offers insight into how such artistic encounters are necessarily frictional towards provoking doubt, which catalyses perspective forming and critical thinking and which activates participants to shift beyond their habituated patterns of thinking. These shifts can be uncomfortable places and spaces which demand hard work and steadfastness for the perspectives to be challenged through embodied engagement. Once experienced, the mere encounter cannot be un-witnessed. Even if the participant has put up a defence, their experience of the activities remain an experience that they have felt and embodied. All participants then personally unravel the entanglements and the shifts, which induce compassion and empathy towards transformative change. This may happen during the experience, or after, when the participant continues to grapple with their perceptions and take-aways, and assess their responses, to make personal discoveries or make concerted resolutions. In this offering, the human participants involved include the “artist-as-creative-act”¹, which references them as instigators/initiators/provocateurs that facilitate the frictional artistic encounter, and the “spect-actor”² who contributes as a co-creator of the(eir) new realities which

¹ Surrealist artist Duchamp spoke of ‘the creative act’ (Baas, 2023; Haladyn, 2019), where he describes the artist upon creating where ‘all his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out’.

² To assist in distinguishing between an immersed participant-spectator, and a spectator who is just an engaged observer, in performing arts, theatre activist Augusto Boal (1992: 19-25) coined the term spect-actor.

emerge from the encounter. The third participant is the “inter-action”³ spaces. The human roles within the participant trio-partnership serve to actuate the(eir) creativity in the artistic encounters through shared embodied learning (Wilson & Foglia, 2017).

This trio are referred to inclusively throughout the paper as “participants”. Each of the three participants plays a vital role in these embodied frictional artistic encounters: the artist-as-the-creative-act as facilitator, the spect-actor as an immersed contributor, and the environment as intra-action space/s. The artistic encounters are the space/s created/held/allowed between these participants that also transform dynamically into healing space/s. The healing is packaged differently for all participants. The encounter may result in immediate embracing of change, or it may plant a seed that will bring forth the change, through realisation or through further personal frictional growth. Both experiences are healing and necessary for an individual on their journey. The specific roles of the trio of participants are equally important to the experience. Each contributes their energies as subjects and objects of the encounter.

I have invited Elmarie⁴ into this conversation. Her voice, thoughts, and opinions (and those of her collaborators) are interspersed within the paper, included as a reflection *on* her work, as well as contributions *from* her work, and therefore offered as dialogue on the discussions in the paper. *To highlight Elmarie’s dialogical stance here within the writing, as if referencing performance text, her entries are italicised for emphasis to portray the presence of her voice.*

This paper serves to articulate a kindred fascination with Elmarie of how the artist may be empowered to use their art not only for self-actualisation, but also to create participatory moments for generating spaces for dialogical exchange – as collaborative learning, as well as change-making. To really understand the impact of their art on being human. To invite people to affect critical thinking, experience creativity, challenge opinions, and to propose alternative perspectives. *To achieve this by allowing ‘the other’* (Biscombe, et al., 2017: 2-18) in, to experience, to truly wit(h)ness⁵ the process. Boscacci notes the constructed word wit(h)nessing ‘as a waymaker that enriches and extends the work of witnessing by embracing the teachings of affect and more-than-visual sensing and mattering in our human encounters’ (2018: 343). The wit(h)nessing word was seeded in the concept of co-creation by Ettinger (Boscacci, 2018), where she explains it as ‘enlarging a notion of with-ness in thinking about human interdependency, resonant also is allusion to – and some unsettling of – the idea and practice of witnessing’. Ettinger, (2006: 147-148) confirms the need for acting as witness while being with the other, as ‘We are carrying, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, enormous traumatic weight, and aesthetic wit(h)nessing in art brings it to culture’s surface’.

³ Barad (2007) describes intra-actions as not occurring in determinate space and time, but says each intra-action alters the configurations as ‘spacetime mattering’.

⁴ Because of her presence in the conversation, I chose to forgo formalities, and reference the late Professor of Visual Communication at University of Stellenbosch, Elmarie Costandius, as Elmarie throughout.

⁵ Wit(h)nessing is a word-concept seeded in ideas of joint creation by feminist theorist of affect, visual artist, and psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger (Boscacci, 2018).

There is risk; but there is also a sharing. Beyond art as testimony (given by the witness), Ettinger is proposing an aesthetic wit(h)nessing: a means of being with and remembering for the other through the artistic act and through an aesthetic encounter. Art becomes a keeper of historical memory for the injured other by creating the site for a novel trans-subjective and transhistorical process that is simultaneously witness and wit(h)ness. (Pollock, 2010: 831)

Through the artistic encounter, the use of with-ness as basis where the artist, artwork and spectator are all witnesses, serves as a philosophical interpretation of the quality of being or actioning 'with' something. The notion of with-ness entangled within the aesthetics and witnessing offers wit(h)nessing as a truly immersive agency, which is further enhanced by Kulundu's constructs of 'instersectional resonance and muliciplicities of being' (2018: 91).

In this article, we (*Elmarie is as integral to the realisations as am I*) propose that these creative spaces be embodied in frictional artistic encounters. In this discussion, I acknowledge *Elmarie's work with embodied and arts-based learning for use in curricula, to enhance critical citizenship, socially just pedagogies, visual redress, and for shared-humanity co-curriculum learning experiences* in creating such spaces and encounters and dialogically offer my own mirrored experiences as further reflections in arts-based practice as research.

Creative dialogical exchange and creative identity-making

The arts are a wonderful catalyst for change through creativity as a dialogical exchange (Boal, 1979). Such dialogical exchanges also exist on a visceral level which includes energy, intent, and responsiveness.

Creativity is defined by educator Robinson (2010) as 'the process of having original ideas that have value'. In these circumstances, creativity is practised by every individual, but most prominently by artists who have been utilising their arts as a creative practice beyond the studio into transdisciplinary and interartistic⁶ applied practice. *Elmarie* (Booyens, 2023) *contributes by expressing that 'I again realised that it is not enough to work on the visual aspects; it is important to also include learning experience. Instead of asking artists to create artworks on campus, I work with students, staff and community members using art-based methodologies to [collaboratively co-]create artworks and work through processes to [bring about] change'*.

The efficacy of the arts is evident when used to evoke creativity and further provides participatory and immersive experiences that may serve to support the construction of an everyday creative identity. In turn, a creative identity can produce creative agency, which involves

⁶ Interartistic is used to denote a field where different arts of a particular field intersect. Interartistic creation, for its part, refers more specifically to 'creative processes based on complex dialogues between various practices that preserve their autonomy' (Lesage, 2008: 13). Lesage (2008) explains her preference for interartistic as a term rather than "interdisciplinary" within the arts disciplines. She affirms that the notion of discipline is associated with the idea of rules, norms, and borders that delimit an artistic field.

the participant's perception of themselves as creatives through 'making or doing something to express themselves, get things done, and/or solve problems in non-traditional or unexpected ways' (Gauntlett, 2007: 21). Creative agency is a direct result of a sense of accomplishment through creative identity and is inclusive of contextual creative affordances that give access to creative agency and the ensuing creative impulses (Culpepper & Gauntlett, 2024: 6). This notion supports the fact that every person is inherently creative, and that activation through creative processes directly affects a person's being, and how they show up in the world. In turn, creativity is ascribed to the essence of intelligence that most people seek, where intelligence may be described as 'diverse ... dynamic ... intelligence is wonderfully interactive' (Robinson, 2006).

It is German artist Joseph Beuys (Viciss, 2015) who takes this notion of creativity as being inherent to all even further when he was quoted as saying, 'Everyone is an artist', expressly saying that 'Every human being is an artist, a freedom being with the capacity to transform the conditions that shape their lives' where Viciss further reflects on this in his art meanderings on life, as:

[An] "artist" was the word to describe the essence of what it means to be a human being: The deep need and fundamental ability to create and be creative. In this sense, "everyone is an artist" means that everyone can and needs to be creative ... It doesn't matter what your means of expression are - being an artist means being creative in whatever way is available for and feels natural to you. (2015)

McGarry (2022) as an artist scholar has taken this further and applied Beuys' quotation to agency and transformative and transgressive learning. The famous quote by English artist, Eric Gill (Moussalli, 1997) also supports this construct: 'The artist is not a different kind of person, but every person is a different kind of artist'. It is these perspectives on art, creativity and being (an artist) that influenced my work and that of Elmarie when utilising arts practices to promote self-actualisation, learning, and for actioning change.

Elmarie understood that educating artists requires special focus and engagement in higher education. She understood that we must move beyond merely training the practice of artmaking and move towards honing the skills of the artist towards a profession and move a student's perspectives towards understanding the vocation of how their creativity can be harnessed towards being an artist. She understood how students themselves, as artists, can use their artistic encounters to affect and shape the world around them. *Elmarie encourages us to think of how 'The creative process becomes a "boundary object" to enhance learning instead of only using direct verbal or written means of learning. Involving communities around the campus to collaboratively create and innovate also breaks down the historical and current divisions between participants'* (Booyens, 2023)

Through this notion of educating students as artists, I found a kindred spirit in Elmarie where we could soundboard our ideas for artistic training and embodied learning. Most especially as we both found the emergent creative practices useful in interartistic applied encounters with

far-reaching influences. For this paper, it is the encounters within and between applied arts⁷ and applied theatre⁸ that are being interartistically juxtaposed. The applied aspects to both Elmarie and my art disciplines is discussed and defined further in the following section.

Encountering Elmarie as a kindred spirit

I met Elmarie for the first time as a fellow participant in the Teaching Advancement at Universities (TAU)⁹ first cohort of 2015-2016. We often chatted and found synergies in our thoughts on arts, learning and shared knowledge exchanges. The training of artists in our respective disciplines – design, fine arts, and performing arts; and the shared discipline of education – led us both to our mutual intrigue in how art can be disruptive and thereby a catalyst for transformation. This encapsulates the trajectory of how we engage from an embodied perspective within the creative process and the learning-training dialogical exchange for artists. Elmarie offered much acknowledgement and support for the alternative practices that I chose to explore. I, in turn, was fascinated by her parallel explorations of applied art and art therapy approaches towards affecting change in opinions, perceptions and perspectives. We continued our supportive discussion of ideas over the years, which further advocates for the exploration of such learning and training modes for the future. This was indeed a turning point in how I viewed and perceived working with students, and (re)aligned my educational scholarship of learning and teaching of creative practice going forward.

Elmarie says of her own work, 'I believe it is through the combination of theory and practice that new understandings and insights emerge. I believe that mind-body learning is the most effective way to learn'. (Booyens, 2023)

My studies include Theatre for Empowerment, which looks at the multiplicities of applied theatre practices into foregrounding their use for positive outcomes (most notably the inclusion of Augusto Boal's Theatre of the Oppressed methods in Image and Forum Theatre, as I trained with him in 1998). These studies were followed by the development of a model for Warping: (Re)Conceptual Theatre Making, which, despite the return to mainstream theatre modes as an artistic medium, retains the notion that art and creativity are inextricably linked to the human

⁷ Applied art is defined as artistic designs made for utilitarian objects in everyday use. Art therapy is a mental health profession that enriches the lives of individuals, families, and communities through active art-making, creative process, applied psychological theory, and human experience within a psychotherapeutic relationship.

⁸ Applied theatre refers to the practice of using theatre-based techniques as tools to explore issues of concern to communities and to provoke and shape social change. The techniques offer the opportunity to develop new perspectives and imagine new approaches to issues and actions (Prentki & Preston, 2009).

⁹ The TAU Fellowships Programme seeks to build a cadre of teaching fellows in a wide range of disciplines over a 19-month programme, involving block week contact sessions, individual projects in own teaching and learning settings, group projects and reflective reports; participants are drawn from all South African universities (TAU, 2020).

condition and that theatre reflects the human condition towards advocating change. Theatre may be seen as a 'rehearsal for a revolution' (Boal, 2006: 11). Therefore, my process and creative practice in Warping theatre making practices specifically include affect-inducing participation and portraying current social issues in South Africa (most noticeably faced by women) (Lewis, 2018).

After my involvement with TAU and engagement with Elmarie and other influential scholars of learning and teaching, my focus turned to documenting my adventures with learning engagements. Such as the integration of multimodality to challenge and re-imagine actor-training through the implementation of performance platforms incorporating embodied-LPS¹⁰ (Lewis & Lemmer, 2018) and how the art of theatre making serves as a healing practice not only for the sentient spectator as participants but also for the visceral creatives that dare to collude towards generating a performance that embraces disruptive innovation. Here, the focus on training of the student artist in embodied and experiential learning activations serves transformation. The training further includes the processes of how to take action on these transformative inclusive learning encounters with alternative participants in their found environments. It is exactly this notion of art as an inclusive, participatory encounter towards *evoking transformation* (Fataar & Costandius, 2021) that *Elmarie's work with visual redress so adeptly encapsulates*.

Training of an artist or in artmaking necessitates immersive embodied learning where the very nature of who and what it means to be creative (inclusive of one's creative identity) may be encapsulated and found within the artist and their way of thinking and being in the world.

Embodiment, aesthetic embodiment and embodied learning

Elmarie and colleagues contend that: 'The aim of learning is to have a lasting effect, and the imprint that the combination of mind/body/material/space makes could have a better result than only working cognitively'. (Costandius, et al., 2020: 106)

This resonates with Haarhoff, et al's, statement that 'Humans are bodyminded beings, multimodal and embodied in and through action, shaped by experiences' (2022: 234). Understood as such embodiment involves more than the mind. It can be attributed to the bodymind connectivity through enactivism¹¹ (Thompson, 2007).

Art processes and performance in combination with thinking and material often trigger some unconscious thoughts to come to consciousness. The mind is often not aware of what the body can and wants to express, ... and could emerge during an entangled mind/body/material art and performance process. (Costandius, et al., 2020: 106)

¹⁰ Embodied-LPS stands for embodied-learning/performance/space(s) (Lewis & Lemmer, 2018).

¹¹ According to Thompson (2007), enactivism proposes an alternative to dualism as a philosophy of mind, in that it emphasises the interactions between mind, body, and the environment, seeing them all as inseparably intertwined in mental processes.

Embodiment and the creative identity-making moments allow for such entangled sharing of personal encounters, rendering them as (un)making moments¹² as a decentring that allows for new perspectives to be formed. Therefore, perspective forming identity-(un)making moments. *This entanglement of ideas and notions allows the participants to engage with issues pertinent to their personal perspectives, which may lead to alternative ways of thinking and being in the world through their experiences* (Costandius, et al., 2020). This alternative ways of thinking and being in the world speaks directly to change agency, collective and collaborative learning, as well as embodied learning. Kulundu (2018: 100) approaches alternative ways of thinking and being through the discussion on 'what it means to learn in-between and through' asking how 'different embodied experiences or "a multiplicity of being" ... are essential in the pursuit of a sustainable society'. When each participant shares their personal cultural and social-cultural experiences and understandings of the world, their perspectives are heard, felt, and can affect others. *Elmarie and colleagues further assert that, 'Sometimes these shared experiences are frictional, uncomfortable and uneasy making. Unexpected ideas that unsettle the status quo could result from embodied, material, and discursive engagements because art processes are exploratory, experiential and unpredictable'* (Costandius, et al., 2020: 108). Encouraging the participants through such encounters makes the entangled emergence that much more profound. All are in a vulnerable space of aesthetic wit(h)nessing, which may lead to decentering, identity (un)making, and healing.

Healing may be contextualised here as emotional healing from trauma or guilt. In our fractured South African history, where reconciliation is still being negotiated, the sense of being burdened with emotional traumas may extend to being passed down through generational experiences, making their presence reality. To heal would mean to shine light into these dark spaces through shared encounters, become vulnerable, embrace the guilt/shame and/or anger/resentment, and be uncomfortable in order to find the peace of understanding and acceptance. This is made possible by truly being present, and through embodiment.

In the book *Embodiment and the Arts: Views from South Africa*, editor as visual and cultural studies scholar Jenni Lauwrens defines embodiment as follows:

[E]mbodiment acknowledges both the material body and the body's orientation in the environment – physically, psychically, emotionally, cognitively and intellectually. This spatial or environmental dimension of embodiment includes one's actions, moods, perceptions, personal experiences and the cultural contexts and personalities that shape them. (2022: 8)

Further, embodiment is attributed to being more attuned towards sensory perception for meaning-making, as it only considers cognitive and critical thinking approaches. This sensory

¹² The term (un)making is a neologism for the purpose of this article. It specifically denotes the duality of the concepts making and unmaking with regards to the sharing of personal encounters to allow for new perspectives.

meaning making is achieved by reflecting on aesthetic encounters towards an approach 'that prioritises an aesthetic of embodiment' (Lauwrens, 2022: 10). Aesthetic embodiment connects people and their environment, which adopts musician and philosopher Arnold Berleant's perspective of art as an aesthetic engagement and experience:

[A]esthetic engagement emphasises the contextual character of aesthetic appreciation, involving active participation in the appreciative process, sometimes by overt physical action but always by creative perceptual involvement. ... Sensible experience and perception, itself, were reconfigured to recognise the mutual participation of all the sensory modalities, including kinaesthetic and somatic sensibility. (2013: 1-6)

This concept of aesthetic embodiment, which encompasses aesthetic engagement through somatic and sensory perception, is akin to the notions of this paper's expressed embodied frictional artistic encounters. There is a collapse, overlap or e/merging of the encountering space/s of artist, spectator, and their environment. Lauwrens presents 'the environment or space in which human subjects and material objects meet' to mean that 'exploring what art shows, rather than what art says – is given attention when we take an approach that is embedded in an aesthetic embodiment' (2022: 11).

If embodiment in relation to the utilisation of space and aesthetics may be considered both as a psychological place of being, as well as the physical thoughts on the space (and environment) as a site for literal activation and participation. Embodied learning may then be interpreted as a somatic approach to learning that considers both the individual's entire experienced history and current experience (Lewis & Lemmer, 2018).

Elmarie stresses:

Immersive embodied practices have the potential to assist in decolonising the body-mind, which could enhance teaching and learning practices. Social justice education does not happen through rote learning, and alternative educational practices need to be explored to further learning processes. (Booyens, 2023)

In agreement, Liz Lerman (Schenck, 2013) at Dance Exchange describes embodied learning as utilising kinaesthetics and somatics as mediums through which we internalise knowledge, where: 'when you embody a process, you start to realise what you do not understand, and you begin to ask questions ...'. Wilson and Foglia (2017) describe this fundamental concept of 'learning by doing' as a premise of embodied learning through embodied cognition. In philosophy, embodied cognition holds that a person's cognition is strongly influenced by aspects of a person's body beyond the brain itself.

Elmarie and Ruth Andrews caution on perpetuating the view that cognition can be separated from corporeal experience:

Student wellbeing cannot be separated from the process of learning, as to do so reinforces outdated dualisms that see cognition as separate from corporeal experience. ... [E]mbodied and arts-based learning strategies offer new ways of thinking and learning, and as such can become powerful tools for engaging students meaningfully in the transformation project. (Costandius & Andrews, 2023: 13)

It stands then to say that a sense of aesthetics is present within embodied learning, with the focus on the embodiment being bodymind connectivity through somatic action. The participatory experiential environment generated by embodied artistic encounters supports the learning through engagement. Here, the artistic endeavour also serves to provide the provocation of doubt towards an empathetic response in perspective forming. This sense of awakening doubt through artistic perspective forming is activated through engaging empathy, where an empathetic response is a result of careful attention to self and others (Reiss, 2013).

According to Edith Stein, a German phenomenologist, empathy can be facilitated. It also can be interrupted and blocked, but it cannot be forced to occur ... When empathy occurs, we find ourselves experiencing it, rather than directly causing it to happen. (Davis, 1990: 708)

If the participants are in a state of being uncomfortable, of unease, it challenges their awareness (of self and others) which offers then a space to challenge their perspective forming through questioning their current judgements it is such that contributes to a sense of evoking feelings of doubt. In this conversation, the artistic involvement in facilitating and promoting such awareness of attitudes and behaviours will first be positioned through understanding the artist as the creative act, and then the presence of evocative doubt as a catalyst will be explored.

Whether the perspective forming lies with the artist or is that of the spectator who interprets the actions portrayed or performed by the artist, or the spect-actors themselves as immersed participants – wit(h)nessed. All are affected by the artist, who is and of themselves the creative act. The embracing of creativity needs to be totally embodied. It needs to be filtered into our being. Rather than resorting to teaching the emulation of the professional creative or vocational artist, what should be taught is to gain insight into the artist's perspective on life, through the construct of an artist-as-creative-act (Lewis & Mhlongo, 2022).

Artist as the creative act

It is the artist as the creative divergent, or disruptive thinkers, who are the ones who dig deep, take risks and accomplish their objectives in artmaking, despite what others think. When artists are successful and revered for their artefacts and achievements, the irony of being first perceived as divergent and disruptive, is now heralded as their artistic ability. The struggle to be creative is not being understood as the driving force (Lewis, 2021). The artist is the epitome of creativity in that creative acts are diverse, dynamic, and interactive just by virtue of being creative.

Surrealist artist Duchamp spoke of 'the creative act' (Baas, 2023; Haladyn, 2019), where he describes the artist upon creating where 'all his decisions in the artistic execution of the work rest with pure intuition and cannot be translated into a self-analysis, spoken or written, or even thought out'. The artist is of themselves the creative act.

We learned to appreciate how things came together that produce certain relations and how the relations led to new understandings. The lecturers and students were often surprised with what they could spontaneously produce, even though it was not planned beforehand. The coming together of ideas, bodies and material produced knowledge that was unexpected and new. These new knowledges and ways of knowing could include embodied/embrained "knowing" and new insights and realisations regarding the self in relation to others. (Costandius, et al., 2020: 106)

As such, art has undeniable benefits to those who practise it, more so to those who aspire to be these 'creative acts' as professional artists in their own form or fashion, but this creativity is available to everyone to fully embrace what it is to be a more holistic human being. Through their unique perspective forming on life, artists should inspire all people to explore their potential through art, where at the heart lies the fact that art encourages embodied life-long learning.

The artist, perceived as the creative act, is the activist towards initiating the embodied frictional artistic encounters – rendering the artist as creative act an activist (Nossel, 2016). They serve as facilitators of the artistic bouquet they have assembled for the encounter and are often seen to be provocateurs or animators within the experience. They provoke a response or illicit a reaction to the artistic offering and animate the participants to engage and respond to the process. Therefore, they serve as alchemists of creativity in artistic experiences who strive towards embodied learning through care-filled spaces towards changing perspectives and harnessing compassion for transformation. Here, 'art has the ability to change our minds – inspiring us to take on different perspectives and to reimagine our worlds' (Nossel, 2016: 103). The artist purposively decentralises their position to foreground the transformative power of the encounter, whilst still being a catalyst by holding the engergetic space for creativity to flourish. The artist as the creative act constitutes modalities for becoming, rather than being limited to individuals practising art as a particular vocational field. As such, substantiating the relevance and importance of arts-based practices to highlight the entangled and intra-active manner in which artistic practices explode boundaries of self and others, within muliciplicities of being. Futher supporting the emergence as an activist – the artist who purposively harnesses the art's utility in activism (Nossel, 2016).

Awakening doubt through artistic perspective forming for empathic knowledge

Applying creativity through creating encounters which enable receptiveness and responsiveness to art experience activates embodied learning that tickles critical thinking skills and immerses the maker in compassion and understanding, resulting in empathy. As advocated by Nussbaum,

as humans we need to understand the experience of others through artistic work, specifically literary imagination,¹³ where:

if compassion is essential for civic responsibility, then we have good reason to teach works that promote the types of compassionate understanding we want and need. This means including [artistic] works that give voice to the experiences of groups in our society that we urgently need to understand. (1997: 99-100)

Nussbaum is advocating specifically for the literary arts to generate critical thinking through compassion (2010: 106-108). I would argue that this is not isolated only towards the literary arts, which entices the imaginations of the readers as creative accomplices. It is the viscerally provocative space/s that all art applications generate/allow/hold for enticing, challenging, alluring, encouraging, stimulating, and confronting a response, specifically a visceral embodied response, not merely a cognitive rationalisation. It is precisely through embodied encounters or participation with the arts that activates this compassionate critical thinking. The more immersed the participant is within the art experience, the more likely that these artistic encounters result in empathy. Therefore, the arts are catalysts through their being frictional space/s – scratching and enticing participants out of their comfort zones towards undoing social constructs and limitations by changing their perspective, resulting in identity-(un)making.

Elmarie and Ruth Andrews agree with this transformative approach to how arts may be integral in enabling critical thinking: '[E]mbodied and arts-based learning can facilitate critical thinking, personal engagement with course material, holistic perspectives and the recognition of agency of the human and non-human'. (2023: 12)

Additionally, in James Southworth's (2022) article on critical thinking towards transformational learning by initiating perspective taking, he encourages the activation of doubt as a catalyst for change. He argues that 'without the ability to bring ourselves from a confirmed belief to a position of doubt, the possibility for intellectual and personal growth is limited' (Southworth, 2022: 45). Further, in his motivation towards the possibilities of awakening states of doubt through perspective taking as a narrative experience, Southworth promotes Nussbaum's (2010: 7) use of the arts as an experience in developing the narrative imagination through compassion. Whilst acknowledging that 'the arts are essential disciplines in part because they help students cultivate their empathic knowledge, these disciplines need not have an exclusive claim on the development of students' empathy' (Southworth, 2022: 57). Arts, therefore, are useful in activating spaces for agitation towards perspective taking experiences to occur, where the challenging of perspectives necessitates vulnerability and risk-taking. Moreover, the 'taking' of experiences may seem as if it is the act of claiming what is already there, whereas, the arts maybe should be seen as being useful for perspective *forming*, where the arts offer an opportunity to explore with and from various perspectives, thereby allowing the development of

¹³ Literary imagination is interchangeable as narrative imagination (Southworth, 2022: 56).

a more nuanced understanding. Creativity and arts spaces allow 'the ability to generate problems, to move beyond one's habituated patterns of thinking, and to recognise complexity', and all these abilities are essential to both critical thinking and transformative learning

Thinking critically involves an ongoing process of resolving and arousing states of doubt. Perspective [forming] is essential to the latter. When students develop the ability to recognise problems and bring themselves to a state of doubt, they can unleash the full potential of learning: its power to transform. (Southworth, 2022: 59)

Philosophers have grappled with the concepts of scepticism and doubt, but what Southworth is suggesting is not the doubt itself (or the negating thereof) that should be the focus but the arousal of doubt (Southworth, 2022: 46, 55). Evoking feelings of doubt will allow the questioning of beliefs and actions, which in turn may affect transformation. The provocation towards doubt may best be aroused through perspective forming experiences. It is the freedom of the arts perspective forming which may play a foundational role in embodied learning and transformative processes.

We argue that creative practices are designated as perspective forming explorations for both artist as creative act and spect-actor. The artist-as-creative-act immerses themselves in the perspective of others to effectively portray their intent for art representation or performing a role. The spectator, in turn, wit(h)nesses this as an experiential encounter. Where wit(h)nessing (Boscacci, 2018) is trans-subjective and entails more than bearing witness, the artist, artwork and spectator are all witnesses. It serves to draw the spectator in to simultaneously encounter the experience through identifying with the encounter through a mirrored experience of the induced vulnerability and emotional contextualisation. Further, to distinguish between an immersed participant-spectator, and a spectator who is just an engaged observer, theatre activist Augusto Boal coined the term spect-actor (1992: 19-25). Where a spect-actor implies that the spectator is an active participant in the activity of voluntarily engaging through vicarious risk-taking. Through art, the more the spectator participates in or is immersed within the art offering as a spect-actor, the more a visceral response is induced. The visceral response may further move the spect-actor towards empathetic perspective forming and thereby towards offering activations embracing embodied states of inducing evocative doubt. Conscious of the social injustices as themes that the art space allows which are not always 'care-full' but are 'care-filled', this offers a powerful and facilitative learning force through frictional and visceral encounters.

Thereby rendering activated arts spaces to be embodied frictional encounters when guided in doing art (as a participatory or immersive experience) or exploring creativity. The spect-actor as integral wit(h)ness with the artist, and the artwork/artmaking induce perspective forming experiences from within these embodied frictional artistic encounters, which may then be harnessed for change, undoing, and healing.

Spect-actor as resonant wit(h)ness

As the name implies, a combination of spectator-and-actor, as a 'spect-actor', is a figure who deliberately and self-consciously inhabits both worlds: 'fictitious and reality; as observer and actor in both' (Boal, 1992: 21). The provocative artistic engagement elicits activation from a personal and socio-cultural association in such a way that it causes a sensory experience which in turn triggers meaning-making. This results in discussion and debate with other spect-actors (during or after the encounter) (Lewis & Van Der Merwe, 2020).

The immersion of spect-actors as fully engaged participants allows for the blending of perspective forming. *Elmarie explains this phenomenon in connection to power dynamics: when topics emerged spontaneously, the participants were more willing to discuss the issues, as they felt that they had discovered it themselves and it was not a top-down process. 'The workshops might have started with topics very related to their own professional field, but they would often end with exploring more interrelated personal or socio-political concepts'* (Costandius, et al., 2020: 96-97). *Elmarie and colleagues further attribute this to intra-related involvement, where intra means 'within' therefore, implicates the participant to take responsibility for their involvement and actions.*

This immersed participation through intra-related involvement implies that the activities and engagement are co-created by the spect-actors' embodied involvement. The perspective forming being explored is thereby also, as such, co-created and emergent. Not necessarily always from a position of illiciting evocative doubt but also curiosity and epistemological risk-taking or as a response to ambiguity. *As Elmarie puts it, 'The engagement was not only an interaction where they discussed various issues among themselves, but the physicality of body sculptures also made visible the subtle relations that existed between them that enabled collaboration'* (Costandius, et al., 2020: 97). Thereby a space for the discussion of uneasy topics or hurt-filled experiences was created for handling with collaboration and care. Which further advocates for a rhizomatic context for embodied frictional artistic encounters.

The social and political conversations also emerged because of the rhizomatic manner in which the art process in the workshops functioned. The art process opened the space to link whatever came to mind in a non-hierarchical and non-linear way to multiple connecting points, and very often the socio-political issues that the participants experienced in their lives, especially because of the colonial and apartheid experiences that many people in South Africa had, emerged. The rhizome can be described as a group of multiplicities bound together and in relation to one another that continuously reshape and reform. (Costandius, et al., 2020: 100)

The interconnected listening and engagement between participants as a co-affective experience can further be ascribed to embodied learning as a sensory involvement of aesthetic wit(h)nessing. Here, the encounter-exchange allows for dialogical engagement, transcending our personal boundaries into perspective forming, which embraces channelling through aesthetics

the South African ubuntu consciousness philosophy of 'I am because we are' into the assembled ubuntu aesthetics (Sidogi & Ndou, 2021: 15).

Aesthetic wit(h)nessing works both ways through intra-related involvement which includes the spect-actors, along with the artist-as-creative-act, who primarily serves as facilitator of the frictional activities and initiates the holding of space for these encounters to emerge. 'We cannot but share the pain or trauma, i.e. the events of the other. We cannot but bear it, transport it, and potentially create a future precisely by such sharing, by recognizing co-humanity rather than anxiously policing the boundaries of difference' (Pollock, 2010: 829).

There comes a time in the encounter when both artist and spect-actor take ownership through the creative dynamic flow, and all become leaders of the process through mutual engagement, resulting in the dialogical exchange of roles to allow all present to benefit by perceptively receiving what they need from the process. 'Certain contemporary art practices bring to light matrixial alliances by confronting the limits of trauma's shareability and the *jouissance*¹⁴ of the Other' (Ettinger, 2006: 147). *Elmarie and collaborators confirm this collaboration when they describe how 'The facilitators and participants learned and grew with each process'* (Costandius, et al., 2020: 97).

Contemporary theatre director and academic Anne Bogart refers to this perceptively receiving and dialogical exchange as 'the art of resonance' where 'one energetic being influences the vibrations of another':

Humans are resonating bodies that vibrate and fluctuate and each of us gains our identity, a sense of who we are, through the quality of our relationships to the experiences outside of ourselves ... No good can be achieved by shutting oneself off from the world or from the environment because exposure to discomfort and dissonance is as vital to our development as our need for food and water. (Bogart, 2021: 5)

Bogart takes the resonance concept further by embracing morphic resonance that includes a notion of repeated spaces in time, in turn accentuating the environment as the third and vital participant in the trio – artist-as-creative-act, spect-actor, and the environment as intra-action space/s. Bogart references biochemist Sheldrake's (2006) notion of morphic fields where nature is alive and morphic resonance is the 'influence of previous structures of activity on subsequent similar structures of activity organised by morphic fields'. (2021: 10)

Environment as intra-action space/s

As humans, we are constantly in flux with our environment and 'to be human, indeed, to be living, is always to be in a situation, a context, a world' (Varela, et al., 2017: 59). Our environment includes others – humans and non-humans – for us to identify ourselves through associations, wit(h)nessing and meaning making. Where wit(h)nessing ascribes it as humanimal encounters

¹⁴ *Jouissance* is a French word meaning hysical or intellectual pleasure, delight, or ecstasy.

(Boscacci, 2018). Everything around us is encapsulated within our environment, which often is only made 'visible' through intra-action. *Elmarie contends that intra-actions guide the production of meaning and events in themselves, via affect. Here Elmarie and colleagues (Costandius, et al., 2020: 100) quote Barad (2007) to describe intra-actions as not occurring in determinate space and time, but says each intra-action alters the configurations as 'spacetime mattering'.*

Intra-actions open avenues to experiment instead of finding solutions, and Elmarie and colleagues further describe this inter-relationship within the arts-based processes they followed:

The process that we followed by indirectly opening spaces through art practice and performance has the potential to make visible the links between spaces, bodies and the discursive and in that way expose the social and political hierarchies and power relations. (Costandius, et al., 2020: 100)

This creation and linking of spaces is akin to the concept of morphic resonance that is illustrated in arts-based practice by Bogart as an overlapping of space in time. Morphic resonance enables memories to permeate both space and time (2021: 8-10), which vibrates with the concept of hauntology¹⁵, which *Elmarie harnessed in her work with visual redress:*

Spaces are entrenched with haunting narratives of the past. Spaces that experienced trauma can be 'read' through hauntology in a historical sense ... The haunting informs our understanding of what was and shapes what will be. It could also serve as a call for more mourning; to hollow out memories and remind us of our shared vulnerabilities. (Costandius, et al., 2024: 1-15)

Both the concepts of morphic resonance and hauntology confirm that the environment in which the artistic frictional encounters take place permeates and informs the experience through affect. Often, if we gather in a space for creative purpose and where the focus is on the space (its history or legacy) the focus is taken off ourselves. There, the transition to intra-action and sharing can transpire more effectively and faster. However, despite the focus starting at one point, the encounter always shifts to be inclusive of intrapersonal reflexivity, which allows for perspective forming. There is no set formula or recipe that can be followed to effect this intra-action

¹⁵ Hauntology (a combination of haunting and ontology) which is a range of ideas referring to the return or persistence of elements from the social or cultural past, as in the manner of a ghost. The term is a neologism first introduced by French philosopher Jacques Derrida (1994) and encapsulates the idea that the present is haunted by the metaphorical 'ghosts' of lost futures. Hauntology of everyday life develops its central argument that all human experience is fundamentally haunted and is described as a recall of experience – not to exorcise the past, but simply to recognise and address the endless ghosts that are created by the very act of human perception and experience through time (Rahimi, 2021: 1-8).

exchange. The intra-actions are diffractive they generate patterns of difference through material-discursive encounter, where dialogical engagement is dependent on the synergy between the trio of participants.

We are constantly seeking new processes or methods and meaning-making intra-actions, but not with the aim of finding the ideal and final methodology to be followed. It goes against the very essence of an artistic process where there are no regulations regarding what the correct methods or theories are to be used, where space, body and material are free to use what emerges in the thought process at that moment. (Costandius, et al., 2020: 108)

What is clear is that the environment is an essential participant for supporting the artistic encounter as either a frictional instigator, or as a refuge as care-filled space/s, and should have the potential to hold the dynamics to transform into, and hold space for, healing.

Parallel personal embodied frictional artistic encounters

When revisiting Elmarie's reflections on her work and the legacy she has left, the synergies between *Elmarie's explorations into how the arts may be utilised for change through embodied learning, both in visual redress and critical citizenship* are extraordinary when drawing parallels to my trajectory of arts-based learning and the human dialogical exchange towards redress. Above, I reference our relationship as that of kindred spirits. In this section, I will draw attention to these parallels which resonate with Elmarie's timelines. We never got to work on projects together, but we *are*-were eagerly caught up on the developments of our arts explorations when our paths *cross*-crossed. Our crossroads fuelled each other through acknowledgement and encouragement and further supported our independent exploits.

To provide context for my experiences with embodied learning and the power of artistic dialogical intra-actions, I will first provide a short overview of what work I was doing to achieve these outcomes. At the onset of my dalliance in learning higher education teaching, I was instrumental in curriculating and implementing an elective stream in applied theatre within the then Drama Department of Technikon Pretoria.¹⁶ This curriculum was largely influenced by interactive approaches to drama/theatre in education principles and the work of the Theatre of the Oppressed by Augusto Boal. I taught this elective for twenty years, between 1995 and 2015, after which I happily passed on the baton to alums and colleagues who have taught it since. The elective was named Educational Theatre (now offered under the banner of Applied Theatre and Theatre for Community Development as it articulates), which embrace all methods for application

¹⁶ Technikon Pretoria since merged with two other higher education institutions to form Tshwane University of Technology in 1999. The department of drama evolved in all its iterations over 50 years and is currently integrated in the Department of Performing Arts within the Faculty of Arts & Design <https://www.tutfadshowcase.ac.za/>

in educational, developmental, and industrial theatre. The elective is steeped in experiential learning and in my tenure included many hands-on projects where student artists could engage with communities in bringing about change in perspectives and behaviour. The elective also included entrepreneurial perspectives in teaching the students how they may use their learning to be instrumental in creating their own projects and work opportunities for themselves and others.

When it came to applied theatre, I facilitated the learning as a dialogical intra-action, which influenced my research into generating a conceptual framework in theatre for empowerment applications within South Africa. The various projects that resulted over the years included engagement with a variety of topics and communities. Health and well-being were featured in awareness projects about drug abuse, unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, HIV and AIDs. The environmental projects included waste management, plastic and tin recycling, and the storage of atomic waste products. Human relations were explored in projects dealing with power relations, race and gender dynamics, communication, transformation and reconciliation, abuse, bullying, depression and suicide, eating disorders, as well as life skills outreach for children living in shelters and on the street. Many of the projects garnered sponsorship or were commissioned from the likes of the Department of Health and Education, South African Breweries, Atomic Energies Corporation, UNISA Library, the Plastics Federation, the Association of Psychology, and various shelters, schools, and social workers working within the greater Tshwane metropolitian. While we travelled as far afield as Springbok in the Northern Cape to execute our projects, we also successfully ran projects "at home" as university-wide projects in collaboration with student services where we visited the residencies and generated programmes resulting from the topics that emerged. The projects were all participatory and often engaged with participants from various communities in establishing their own productions to further prompt engagement within their own sectors.

Meanwhile, parallel to these interactive projects (and since), I teach movement studies and physical theatre, acting, arts administration and the creative industries, as well as devising and directing public performances. It was with my research over the years that I understood the difference between facilitating and teaching as the parallel modules and electives required a different approach to the embodied learning engagements. I focussed on finding ways to include more interactive and dialogical spaces within the learning encounters for the other courses. Also, my public productions include social justice-themed issues and articulate ways of expressing, including non-verbal communication that is not literal storytelling, to entice a visceral response from both the creatives as well as the sentient spectators. Much of my research has gone into how arts and theatre making may be evocative and engage the audience in a variety of responsive ways, as well as how to inspire such thinking and practices.

Through performance making, healing from abuse and trauma forms fractal themes found in many of the performance pieces that I have designed, devised, and directed over the years. The performance art pieces, which I often do myself, expose the raw harshness of the types of abuse even more intimately. The performances are offered as confessional narratives of my own

experiences and emotional scars and turmoil that formed the basis for healing through my chosen artistic outlet – performance. The narratives take the form of performance art pieces with strong somatic non-verbal undertones within the performance making. As a qualified Touch For Health kinesiologist¹⁷, now even more so, I can articulate the process of creating and navigating somatic performance where the entanglements and patterns are revealed, and the movement of healing is set in motion. It begins with embodied frictional artistic encounters.

Elmarie and my work remain synergetic despite being separate and our timelines running parallel regardless of the space and time that has lapsed between our meetings, I believe all artists exploring with embodied frictional encounters are in sync. In this description, we are just two examples from South Africa, but we are amongst many global activists. We are all connected and contributing to this body of work through Ervin Laszlo's concept of the Akashic Field. Akin to the morphic resonance concepts included in this paper, the Akashic Field includes the idea of a cosmic memory in which 'all information and knowledge are overlaid, interconnected and preserved. Our very reality is anchored in this vast sea of connected information that gives rise to everything – 'from specks of stardust in the outer cosmos to consciousness itself' (Laszlo, 2021; Grof, 2007: 90).

Conclusion

This paper serves to articulate a kindred fascination with creating embodied learning spaces that include frictional artistic encounters for generating spaces for dialogical intra-action. To create these opportunities towards really understanding the impact that arts can bring to affect critical thinking, experience creativity, challenge opinions, and to propose alternative perspectives.

Such arts-based engagements within education have been actioned in many forms and activated through various titles implying their intent – *visual redress, critical citizenship, social (in)justice* – yet these titles do not encompass the learning or pedagogical intent for embodiment or collaboration. Also, intent requires subheadings pointing to the phenomenological and educational factors. Further, the methods used within these experiences are techniques taken from modalities, including Theatre of the Oppressed, dramatherapy, applied arts, arts-based therapy, and applied theatre, which all foreshadow intervention work. A more positive approach using modalities under an approach named Theatre for Empowerment is also not all encompassing or necessarily inclusive of all arts practices, and again, the learning aspect is not explicit. Therefore, revisiting our conversations, Elmarie and I find the meeting points towards proposing the term embodied frictional artistic encounters. These encounters serve into two sections: Creative Embodied Learning (CEL) and Frictional Artistic Encounters (FAE). Where the embodied learning is enhanced specifically by the creative act, that can be used in conjunction

¹⁷ Touch For Health Kinesiology uses muscle monitoring as a biofeedback system to determine and alleviate physical, emotional, nutritional, or energetic stresses in the body. Developed by Dr. John Thie in the 1970s, it aims to restore the body to its natural state of health (Touch for Health, 2024).

with the frictional artistic encounter, referenced separately, or as one combined acronym (ceIFAE/CELfae).

When pronounced, the acronym sounds like 'selfie'¹⁸. A selfie offers a reflection of who we are in the moment, capturing the experience in time, and simultaneously holds up a private or public mirror for self-reflection on the captured moment. This may speak back to a symbolic construct that all the participants in the artistic encounter are at its core voluntarily (and vulnerably) showing up as themselves to the process, where introspection is as vital to the process as is intentionally removing the proverbial persona, the mask, to fully participate in the aesthetic wit(h)nessing and experience within a collective. Where the conscious interaction on behalf of the artist as the creative act and the spect-actor as participants in the intra-action space/s, reflects on self through affect, generating the frictional artistic elements that lead to perception forming. Therefore, reflections of self in time and intra-action space/s may be a useful associated metaphor. The ceIFAE/CELfae term can be used in conjunction with the intended social activist topic and is indicative of embodied learning towards a collaborative transformative and healing outcome.

As the creative act, the activist initiates the embodied frictional artistic encounters integrating creative embodied learning. In being the artist as the creative act, the notions of being human can be equated to being an artist. It is this multiplication of perspective forming of an artist which can provoke a response or illicit a reaction in others through mirroring the creativity in artistic encounters. The spect-actors and the intra-active environment can be seen as conspiratory participants with the activist facilitator, colluding towards agitating towards evocative doubt and towards changing perspectives and harnessing compassion. Creative identity-(un)making affords agency and transformative and transgressive learning interventions as participatory or immersive experiences within activated arts spaces as embodied frictional encounters. The participants' resonant involvement and aesthetic wit(h)nessing induce perspective forming experiences that may be harnessed for learning towards change, undoing, and healing.


The combination of text, thinking, performing and making has always been part of art processes, but their value in teaching, learning and research in education, the humanities and social sciences have only recently been re-emphasised by the new materialist posthuman perspectives. (Costandius, et al., 2020: 95)

The emergent participants of embodied frictional artistic encounters are forever altered by their experience. They cannot unlearn or unhear or unsee what they have experienced. They have

¹⁸ A selfie is a self-portrait photograph or a short video, typically taken with an electronic device. It is one of the most popular forms of self-portraiture in modern life, and are most often shared on social media, via social networking services. A selfie may include multiple subjects; as long as the photo is being taken by one of the subjects featured, it is considered a selfie (Oxford Dictionary, 2025).

changed. Creativity opens the space/s to be seen and to be heard. Thereby activating transformation. Embracing creative embodied learning (CEL) within co-created embodied frictional artistic encounters (EFA) – CELFAE – results in the use of creativity and embodied learning as invoking transformative and healing space/s.

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