"People Who Do Theatre Are a Bit Posh": Examining the Impact of Class and Ethnicity on Engagement with the Birmingham Repertory Theatre's Youth Theatre (The Young REP)

Natalie Hart and Joe Winston

Abstract This chapter will explore the role that class and ethnicity have on young people's engagement with the Birmingham Repertory theatre, UK and it's youth theatre, The Young REP. Through an examination of spatial dynamics it will investigate the relationships that the groups had within the theatre building and the effect that insider access has on the participants' sense of belonging (or not) in the theatre building. This chapter focuses on Arts and Humanities Research (AHRC) funded Collaborative Doctoral research carried out in 2010 with three of nine youth theatre groups organised by The Birmingham Repertory Theatre (The REP). The REP is a major producing theatre in the centre of a large multicultural city. Forty-two percent of residents are from an ethnic group other than White and 22% of residents were born outside the UK, compared with 14% in England and 11% in the West Midlands region. Alongside geographical, cultural and financial barriers, there are perceptual barriers to accessing the theatre building. In order to explore the youth theatre members' relationships to the theatre, the study took the form of a mixed methods exploratory case study. This chapter will share the findings of some of the more innovative practical research methods which were utilised which included photography, art and drama.

Keywords Youth theatre · Theatre · Space · Place · Ethnicity · Class · Birmingham repertory theatre · Belonging · Multiculturalism · Diversity

N. Hart (✉) · J. Winston
Centre for Education Studies, University of Warwick, Coventry, UK
e-mail: nataliehartdrama@outlook.com; J.A.Winston@warwick.ac.uk

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1 Introduction

This chapter is based upon research undertaken between 2007 and 2012 in pursuit of a collaborative doctoral award, funded by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) in partnership between the University of Warwick, UK, and The Birmingham Repertory Theatre (The REP), UK. The research examined the relationship that the theatre had with its nine youth theatre groups, known as The Young REP. This chapter will focus on three of the groups and explore their relationship with the theatre through an examination of spatial dynamics, ethnicity and social class. The three groups had differing access to the theatre building – occasional audience members (case study one *Small Heath Young REP*), occasional performers (case study two, *Shenley Academy Young REP*), and regularly rehearsing/performing at the theatre (case study three, *14–18 Company 2 Young REP*). The study discovered that the more insider access a young person had to the theatre the deeper the levels of meaning they ascribed to it and that this access was notably affected by ethnicity and social class. The chapter concludes by reflecting on the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by the theatre in response to the findings.

1.1 Context

Located in the centre of Birmingham, The Birmingham Repertory Theatre was founded in 1913 and relocated to a newly built theatre in the centre of the city's civic region in 1971. In September 2013 the theatre re-opened following a temporary closure for refurbishment and now shares a foyer and an additional performance space with the new Library of Birmingham. The first purpose-built British Repertory theatre, and the longest surviving of the English repertory companies established at the start of the twentieth century, it is now the city's only major producing theatre (Cochrane 2003, p.1, p. 5 and p. 6).

Birmingham as a city grew out of the industrial revolution. Positioned in the centre of England, it is the second largest city in the UK with a population of over one million. According to the 2010 census, 42% of this population classified itself as Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and 22% of the population were aged between 0 and 15 which makes it the 'youngest' city in Europe.[1]

One of the ways that The REP offers quality engagement activities to its local community is through a youth theatre. The first youth theatre was established in 1967 and in 1993 The Young REP was launched, offering weekly sessions within the theatre building to encourage the feeling that it was part of the organisation (Cochrane 2003, p. 161). *As* part of a policy to engage young people from communities where

[1] http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/cs/Satellite?c=Page&childpagename=Planning-and-Regeneration%2FPageLayout&cid=1223096353755&pagename=BCC%2FCommon%2FWrapper%2FWrapper

going to the theatre was not a common activity, in 2003 'satellite' youth theatre groups were established at two secondary schools, Small Heath School and Shenley Academy. Facilitators ran weekly sessions after school in the school buildings and other groups were set up at different schools over the next few years. By 2010 there were 200–250 youth theatre members under the banner Young REP.

As a large proportion of the participants of the research were young people aged between 11 and 25, this prompted some methodological considerations. Mainstream research methods can make it hard for young people to express complex views and exclude young people with less verbal and written ability (Bragg 2010, p. 47). However, the use of visual data can offer greater insights and understandings than the written or spoken word. Therefore creative tools such as drama and photography were used alongside questionnaires, participant observation and semi-structured interviews.

2 Cultural Capital

Bourdieu claimed that a lack of social mobility was due to the perpetuation of class boundaries, which in turn was largely due to *cultural capital,* which he describes as "forms of cultural knowledge, competences or dispositions" (Bourdieu and Johnson 1993, p. 7). He states that although cultural tastes are not the initial reason behind social and economic inequalities, they function as social signifiers that justify and uphold social differences (Bourdieu and Johnson 1993, p. 2). The Young REP groups that were based at the theatre itself in the centre of Birmingham were not representative of Birmingham in terms of ethnicity or social class and this was something that The REP staff and many of the young people themselves were aware of and keen to change. Associate Director Steve Ball explained, "Now the majority of Birmingham school pupils are from BAME backgrounds, that's not the case with the Young REP as a whole." This disparity was in part due to the previous use of a waiting list which inadvertently privileged white, middle class children whose parents were theatre goers and had the confidence to enquire about provision and then put their children's names down, in some cases years before they were old enough to attend. The waiting list can be seen as an example of cultural capital being handed down from parent to child, influencing whether theatre would become part of their cultural inheritance or not (Bourdieu 1974; Jackson 2010, p. 25–26; Chan and Goldthorpe 2010; Miles and Sullivan 2012).

Numerous studies have shown how ethnicity can affect cultural preferences (and capital) and how people who are Asian or British Asian predominantly attend performances specific to their own culture, often not returning to the site of these productions to see other performances perceived as not directly relating to them (Harland et al. 1995, p. 37; Belfiore and Bennett 2007, p. 252; Sierz 2011, p. 239). Therefore the dominant culture, of which theatre is a part, can exclude young people from minority ethnicities by simply not interrogating programming choices and unconsciously retaining an exclusive and excluding identity (Said 1993, p. 392;

Berry 2000, p. 9–10). It has been argued that such programming, which comes from a white, European model, fails to address existing cultural imperialism, thus inadequately responding to a post-colonial, globalised, multicultural society (Pannayiotou in Appignanesi 2010; Bharucha 2000, p. 159). The research found that these issues were just as relevant when considering how young people from minority ethnic backgrounds engaged with the youth theatre provision of the REP.

The diverse relationships that the different groups had with the theatre building constituted the most pertinent example of the affect of cultural capital to emerge from the research and this was most clearly demonstrated through a drama workshop that was run with the groups as part of Natalie's fieldwork. The images that the young people created highlighted the different levels of belonging that the young people had in the space and supported the other data emerging from the case study. The group based in a majority Muslim Pakistani area of the city, *Small Heath Young REP*, positioned themselves considerably further away from the theatre than *14–18 Company 2*. The group based in a majority white working class area, *Shenley Academy Young REP*, positioned themselves closer, but still at a significant distance compared to the centrally based group.

3 Case Study One

Small Heath Young REP is based in a community with a majority Muslim Pakistani population. During the field work it emerged that, although establishing this group in a school had removed some significant barriers to the young people attending the Young REP, barriers to a deeper, more meaningful relationship to the theatre itself were still firmly in place. The drama research workshop that was undertaken with them was especially illuminating. Some of their responses to the exercises were very surprising and demonstrated that, although they enjoyed the Young REP group, their experience of and sense of belonging in the Birmingham Repertory Theatre was very limited.

The number of participants in *Small Heath Young REP* ranged from about 15 to 22 at the time of the research, and of the 17 who completed questionnaires, 7 were boys and 10 were girls. There was a general consistency of attendance, with nine participants having attended for more than 2 years, two having attended for over 4 years and only three for less than 6 months. Their ages ranged from 11 to 17. When asked to choose an ethnicity from a selection of tick boxes, 11 selected Pakistani, 1 Indian, 2 Black African and 2 any other mixed background, with one response missing.

The school resides in the area of Small Heath, located in the Eastern Corridor of Birmingham which is home to the majority of Birmingham's Pakistani population (Cole and Ferrari 2008, p. 65 and p. 68). In many ways Small Heath is the quintessential diasporic community (Hesse 2000, p. 11). The demographic make-up of the area is the embodiment of multiculturalism, both as an outcome of political accommodation of migrants from outside the West and as the lived experience of

diversity (Modood 2007, p. 2, Livingstone 2011, p. 29). Small Heath is fairly typical of the way in which the ethnic composition of Birmingham has organised itself: although Birmingham is overall a diverse city, many areas are relatively ethnically mono-cultural, though no more segregated than similar groups in cities (Cole and Ferrari 2008, p. 65). In the case of areas such as Small Heath, this is, some would claim, due to a lack of desire by Asian residents to mix with non-Asian residents. Research suggests, however, that it is most often because 'traditional' white areas have a reputation for organised racist activities and are felt by residents to be hostile (Bains 2006, p. 35 in Cole and Ferrari 2008, p. 70).

The majority of the children who attend the school class themselves as Muslim. In a post 9/11 and 7/7 Britain,[2] Muslims in general, and specifically Muslim youth, are increasingly positioned as troublesome and dangerous and under pressure to respond to accusations of terrorism (Bayat and Herrera 2010, p. 22; Moss and O'Loughlin 2008 in Gillespie and O'Loughlin 2009, p. 97). A general 'Muslimification' of anyone of Asian appearance, a stereotyping of Muslim youth as radical, violent extremists and an increasing prevalence and acceptance of Muslimaphobic positions, complicates the lives of young people growing up Asian and/or Muslim in Britain today (Gillespie and O'Loughlin 2009, p. 97; Bayat and Herrera 2010, p. 4–5; Swedenburg 2010, p. 299). In the context of this research, the young people's identity as Muslim youth had an impact on the ethical and aesthetic decisions made by their youth theatre directors.

After some initial hesitation, Small Heath School embraced the Young REP as staff, students and parents observed the positive impact it was having on the students who were involved. They developed an annual tradition of a pantomime which became an integral part of the school calendar and a social occasion involving food after the performance. However, in the 10 years that the school had participated in the Young REP, they had only had one chance to perform at the theatre. Their youth theatre director, Rhys McClelland, regarded this choice as a safe option, which meant that the youth theatre directors and the staff at the school could avoid asking questions around appropriateness of content, form, costume or dialogue. He also felt that the decision by The REP for the young people to always perform in their own school was based in part on cultural assumptions from The REP that there would be resistance from parents to taking the young people out of the familiar school environment and into the centre of Birmingham. Fear of incidents like *Bezhti*[3] and a desire to be respectful of people's beliefs, meant that Rhys felt he was perhaps over cautious and made some unproven assumptions. He was able to reflect on this through the research process and came to the conclusion that there needed to

[2] 9/11 refers to September 11th 2001 where a series of four coordinated terrorist attacks by the Islamic terrorist group al-Qaeda on the United States. 7/7 refers to a series of coordinated terrorist suicide bomb attacks by Islamic extremists in central London which targeted civilians using the public transport system during the morning rush hour.

[3] On 18 December 2004 hundreds of Sikh protestors attacked the theatre during its performance of *Bezhti* by Kaur Bhatti. Controversially the whole run of the studio theatre's production was cancelled for fear of the safety of audiences both of this play and the Main House Christmas production.

be more dialogue where these queries and concerns could be aired with the young people, parents and members of the community (Hooks 1994, p. 130). The research discovered that some of these assumptions and fears were well founded but others, although well meaning, were not. Samantha Hughes, the Creative Arts teacher at the school, explained that there was a mixture of attitudes to theatre from parents, ranging from a Mosque leader in full support of his son's participation to parents who would not support after school activities, mixed gender events or public emotional expression of any kind. Although going to the theatre wasn't a regular activity for them, several of the students that Natalie spoke to had in fact attended the Birmingham REP with family. However she also experienced a student's mother who had very little English granting permission for her daughter to be involved 'because it was at the school, so it was OK'. Therefore the idea that the school was trustworthy and a 'known factor' had influenced her decision to let her daughters participate in the youth theatre.

Young people in urban contexts are highly likely to have very localised identities. This is heightened by fear of racist assault and can lead to an anxiety about moving beyond their familiar spaces and of having to meet new people (Gidley 2007, p. 150; Hooks 2009, p. 70). As one 15 year old participant, Zahid, stated about the neighbouring area in which he lives, "I do talk to white people and a few Asian people in Bordesley Green and they are friendly and stuff but when you see, like, the odd people in the street, then you see the tension when they walk past each other sometimes". The fear of racism, which is part of the lived experience of diversity and complexities of spatial relationships in a city, in part explains why those from BAME backgrounds in the Eastern Corridor are more likely to stay in the area in which they are born or first reside (Cole and Ferrari 2008, p. 72). This has direct implications for how the young people of Small Heath relate to the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, as to attend it requires them to leave their 'safe' and familiar neighbourhood and venture into the City Centre of Birmingham. This is coupled with practical issues such as lack of independent mobility. Two of the participants, Aisha (14) and Naveed (15), both identified that a barrier to attending a group that met at the theatre was the distance to The REP, as they would need parents to accompany them into the city centre. This lack of independent mobility is in part affected by culture: Samantha Hughes noted that many of the students were not permitted to go very far out of the area, even socially with their friends at weekends.

The young people's ethnicity also impacted on their perceptions of what other young people who participated in youth theatre would be like, and this could make them reluctant to attend groups based at the theatre. Samantha Hughes told Natalie that the students at Small Heath thought other children 'who did theatre' were white, grammar school[4] children, and Aisha was worried that, if she attended the Young REP based at the theatre, she would feel out of place. They are not alone in this view, as there is a general conception that theatre is a white, middle class pursuit

[4] Grammar schools have a selective admission process which is granted to students based on their performance in the Eleven plus exam – pupils are admitted on the basis of a combined score in two tests.

(Harland et al. 1995, p. 38; Sierz 2011, p. 239; Cochrane 2010, p. 131–2; Bennett 1997, p. 89). Unfortunately, for Zahid, this perception became a reality when he attended a Young REP steering group and felt out of place as everyone else was white and middle class. Another factor is a lack of knowledge about the existence of the Young REP, demonstrated by Salima's (14) assertion that she wouldn't have joined Young REP if it wasn't based at her school, "Just because I wouldn't know enough about it to go".

As stated above, the drama research workshop that was undertaken with this group was particularly enlightening. One exercise in particular showed the stark disparity between the Small Heath group's sense of belonging in the theatre space with those of the members of *14–18 Company 2*. A chair was placed in the centre of the room with the phrase 'I am the Birmingham Repertory Theatre'. The participants were then asked to position themselves in the space in relation to the chair and, with the statement "I am", contribute to creating the picture. They demonstrated good knowledge of theatre professions, probably partly due to their experiences of performing with the Young REP at their school. However, they additionally made some offers that would be more applicable for a West End theatre, for example 'I'm Billy Elliot' and 'I'm a comedian'. Three responses were particularly intriguing:

"I'm Beyonce singing at The REP"
"I'm Eminem singing, rapping at The REP"
"I'm the Queen watching the play"

These additions to the picture would be more appropriate for the Royal Variety Show[5] than the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and present a picture very different from the reality.

The reluctance to interrogate the assumptions and realities of the ethnicity and religion of the young people through fear of giving offence and of creating more barriers to participation in the youth theatre had, then, unintentionally resulted in a Young REP group with virtually no understanding of, or relationship with, The REP itself.

4 Case Study Two

Shenley Academy Young REP was established in 2002 when the school was awarded Specialist Arts Status and approached several arts organisations in the city to build partnerships, one of which was the Birmingham REP. There have been several youth theatre directors working with the groups during the 13 year relationship. Natalie was the youth theatre director for *Shenley Academy Junior Young REP* from

[5] The Royal Variety Performance is a gala evening held annually in the United Kingdom, which is attended by senior members of the British Royal Family, usually the reigning monarch. The evening's performance is a variety show consisting of family entertainment, including comedy, singing, dancing, magic and other speciality acts, and many of the performers and hosts are celebrities.

January 2005 to July 2007, and therefore already knew several of the older participants. Although they were based at their school, the group had performed in the studio theatre at The REP several times. As audience members the school took them on trips to the theatre, and several of the older members were beginning to access the theatre more independently.

The experience of performing there had given them the opportunity to create memories and this experience had affected their relationship with the theatre. The meanings held by space are in constant flux and negotiation and affected by the experiences that are had in them (Pandya 1990 in Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003, p. 5; Lefebvre 1991; Tuan 1977). McAuley (1999) notes that, "The frame constituted by a particular building or venue is not something fixed and immutable but a dynamic and continually evolving social entity" (p. 41); and that the perception of a building is dependent on how it is experienced. At the steering group *Shenley Young REP* participant Elisa (13) described her feelings about the theatre as being based on her past and future experiences of performing there, "I like it and like coming up to a performance that you're performing actually at The REP, you look and you think, I'm gonna be there soon." Massey (2005) notes that we should imagine space as "a simultaneity of stories-so-far" (p. 9) and this definition of space was clearly presented by the young people in the research workshop. For example, one group chose a picture of the dressing rooms and themselves lying around being bored and the other group members recognised the scene from their own experiences. Another group had a very practical interpretation of what was 'missing' from The REP pictures, "Something for us to do when we weren't performing and no drinks 'cos we got a bit thirsty". Whereas *Small Heath Young REP* felt very little connection to the theatre, the younger members of *Shenley Academy Young REP* demonstrated that after just one performance in the building they had begun to develop a sense of connection to it and all parties were keen to nurture and enhance this.

Shenley Academy serves an area that experiences significant social and economic disadvantage. The large majority of students are from a White British heritage but with a range of other minority ethnic groups represented. The proportion of students known to be eligible for free school meals[6] is exceptionally high, the proportion with special educational needs and/or disabilities is well above the national figure, and the numbers with a statement of special educational needs is broadly average.[7] Although when The REP first began its relationship with the school it was in Special Measures,[8] by 2011 Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education, Children's

[6] Free School Meals are available to children whose family receive a qualifying benefit such as Job Seekers Allowance or Employment and Support Allowance. Thus it is widely seen as an indicator of low socio-economic status or poverty.

[7] http://www.tes.co.uk/Upload/Attachments/TES/0321410001/Shenley%20Academy%20OFSTED%20Report.pdf

[8] "Schools are made subject to special measures under section 44(1) of the Education Act 2005, where the Chief Inspector is of the opinion that: '….the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education, and the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.'" (Ofsted.gov.uk).

Services and Skills) designated the school as outstanding due to students' academic achievement and their wider personal development (Ofsted 135911, 2–3 November 2011).

Head of Drama, Stephen Lane, stated that the local area suffers from 'stigmatization', and the young people offered a similar picture. Some of this stigmatisation stems from very real issues of socioeconomic deprivation. The MG Rover factory at nearby Longbridge was a major employer until its closure in 2005 made 6300 workers redundant. Those who were re-employed elsewhere earned a fifth less in their new jobs. Discussing the area in his book, *Chavs: The demonization of the working class* (2011), Owen Jones notes, "[…] there is a lack of good, secure jobs and plenty of people out of work through no fault of their own" (p. 193). He describes the community as being plunged into despair and prey to a plethora of social issues associated with deprivation, including anti-social behaviour, drug use and relationship breakdown (Jones 2011, p. 193).

The links between class, participation and social equality are deeply embedded. The reality of social inequality is that the class and ethnicity a child is born into will have a marked impact on their life chances (Barry 2005, p. 41). Class, especially in terms of economic income, has a pronounced effect on civic and cultural participation, and participation in turn affects social equality (Morrow 2011, p. 66; Leverett 2011, p. 16; Bennett 2009, p. 201; Bourdieu 1974). Cultural capital has a two way relationship with social class and social mobility, by on the one hand being more accessible to people of privileged classes, and on the other hand helping them to demonstrate their class status and gain access to positions of power (Belfiore and Bennet 2007, p. 253). Research has shown that amongst many young people there is an attitude that the arts are for 'snobs' and 'not for my class' (Harland et al. 1995, p. 29).

The perception of the arts and theatre as being for people from backgrounds different from their own means that entering cultural buildings can be daunting for young working class people (Gidley 2007, p. 151). This is heightened by external attitudes to working class people in general that have been critiqued by Owen Jones. Although the etymology of the word 'chav' is debated, it is widely seen to be a derogatory term for the working classes and in recent years there has been an explosion of 'chav' stereotypes in the media which has coincided with access to the arts becoming increasingly narrow, thus reducing understanding and empathy for the working classes within the sector and limiting opportunities for them to challenge these stereotypes (Jones 2013, p. 20; Sutton trust 2014).

This has a particular resonance for *Shenley Academy Young REP,* as the derogatory website *Chavtowns* describes Weoley Castle as "[…]the city's chavviest district".[9] It includes references to teachers at Shenley carrying out, "[…]crowd control of the horrendous Chavs of the next generation"[10] and refers to many 'chav' stereotypes such as Burberry clothes, crime, fast food, truancy and illiteracy (Jones 2011, p. 190). Significantly, the Young REP participants regarded their own neigh-

[9] http://www.chavtowns.co.uk/2004/07/birmingham-weoley-castle

[10] http://www.chavtowns.co.uk/2004/07/birmingham-weoley-castle

bourhood as ‘chavvy’. One 12 year old participant, Davina, remarked that “Weoley Castle is the sort of place where you don’t want to live”. They used the word ‘chav’ as a derogatory term, and despite living in these so called ‘chav’ areas, they did not regard themselves as being ‘chavs’ themselves and only one young person used the term ‘working class’ as a personal descriptor. However the participants clearly resented the attitude of people to their area and saw themselves as being different from the young people whom they perceived would attend the centrally based Young REP groups.

Accessing the theatre for the young people was difficult in part because of their geographical location. The school is seven miles – a 40 min bus journey – from the theatre as one participant, Morgan (13), explained, “I probably wouldn’t have gone if it wasn’t here...It’s too far away,”. The younger students also explained that they would not be allowed to travel alone, and would have needed parental accompaniment. Jamie (17) noted that it would have taken much more effort and commitment to have gone to The REP: “There would need to be something else that would, like, wow me for me to go on a bus all the way to town”. The extra motivation, especially initially, to have gone into the centre of Birmingham, into a different environment, would probably have required a prior understanding and knowledge of theatre, the kind of cultural capital that most of the young people at Shenley Academy had not acquired (Bourdieu and Johnson 1993, p. 7). They also demonstrated preconceived ideas about what the young people who attended the centrally based groups would be like, alongside a lack of confidence in their own abilities in comparison:

Jamie: It’s kind of like the stereotype kind of thing of people who do theatre are a bit posh

Peter (17): And they’re really good. To go to the actual REP you have to be really good whereas…

Rory (17): They might look down on you and think oh yeah, you’re just a wannabe or something

Although the centrally based Young REP groups require no audition, the *Shenley Academy Senior Young REP* members imagined them to be more talented and afforded them a higher status to themselves. The fear of what other people at the central groups would think of them was demonstrated by several of the young people:

Trent (18): I think if people attend The REP they actually want to be actors, however if you’re just doing it for fun, like, it would be a bit awkward, like, because they would have higher intentions.

Peter: And probably think I’m not doing my part for the group, you’d probably think that they hate you or something, or dislike you.

The drama research workshop also showed that the young people had a mixed relationship with the theatre building. When a chair was placed in the centre of the room with the statement ‘I am the Birmingham Repertory Theatre’, Khendal (15) was quick to step forward and place himself as an actor into the picture,

Khendal: I am an actor at the Birmingham REP theatre. Can I sit on the chair?
Natalie: If you want to sit on the chair

He lounges on the chair. There is a pause

Khendal: I'm acting by the way

The other young people joined in to contribute: "I'm the director of the play, I'm in the audience, I'm the lighting, Bing!, I'm the audience, I'm selling tickets, I'm the microphone, I'm selling food, I'm buying the food, I'm the receptionist, I'm buying tickets, I'm the lighting supervisor, I'm a prop.". They presented some general theatrical roles, and those who were not as sure (newer members) took the lead from those who were more confident by offering, 'I'm also in the audience' or 'I'm the person -buying -ticket's friend'.

Before the theatre went dark for 2 years to be refurbished, five of the participants were taken to the building to take photographs of areas they felt were important to them. Then, during the drama workshop, the photographs were placed around the room, the young people asked to go to one they felt was most important to them and create a freeze frame that epitomised it. During this exercise they demonstrated a connection to the building that correlated directly with their recent performance at The REP as part of a Young REP festival called *Secrets and Gardens* which was designed to complement a production of *The Secret Garden* then playing on the main stage. Several Young REP groups devised performances with the theme of secrets and gardens and performed them over two evenings in the studio space, the Door, at the Birmingham REP. This had a clear effect on their response to the Photograph exercise as they were able to draw on their experiences and memories of this performance. For example, one group created a particularly interesting image in response to a photograph of the Stage Door and even added some movement spontaneously. When asked to explain it they said:

John: William was holding a balloon with confetti in it, the confetti is obviously excitement and when the door opened it all burst out because all the excitement is let out, we've been excited for so long.
Natalie: What is he excited for?
John: The show. And the door is like you know out of Narnia, do you know the wardrobe? It's like that because you open it and its all adventures.

They were able to vividly show and describe the feelings that they had before their performance, and the exciting potential that it offered them.

However, Trent explained that, although he had enjoyed the performances, he felt that they were not frequent enough, and the relationship with the theatre was still distant: "I think it was good, but like two performances in five years, considering it's based to do with The REP, I think that was pretty bad, but it was a good experience but it felt more uncomfortable because we weren't used to going to The REP". Jamie thought that it didn't feel as official as Birmingham Young REP and Peter (17), who had attended for 5 years, summed up the existing relationship and how he wanted it to be.

Peter: It could have been a lot closer, I mean the way it is, Young REP was as you say a stepping stone into going to acting, so there had to be another stepping stone where you got into The REP, do you know what I mean? Like in football you have your Sunday league team and then you have professional teams that come and watch you and you get asked to come over, so if we had, like, people from The REP spotting and stuff, and realising talent and bringing them over.

Although the relationship that *Shenley Young REP* had with the theatre was much closer than the one *Small Heath Young REP* had it was far from being as intimate as the relationship that the centrally based groups had with the theatre and this we turn to next.

5 Case Study 3

The relationship that the centrally based group *14–18 Company 2* had with the theatre was striking in its' familiarity and sense of belonging in the space. The drama research workshop highlighted this with most clarity and it is especially arresting when compared to the responses from the Shenley and Small Heath groups.

14–18 Company 2 was made up of 14 girls and 4 boys. Seven participants were aged 14 and 11 were aged 15–17. Head of Young People's Theatre, Hannah Phillips, explained that, as many of them had been attending since they were eight, they had grown up in the Young REP, and it was intrinsic to their lives. She felt that this gave them a strong connection with the youth theatre. *14–18 Company 2* had traditionally met to rehearse on Saturdays in the theatre's rehearsal rooms. The young people all paid £45 a term to attend and usually performed in The REP's s studio space, The Door, (when the theatre was open) or at the Old Rep Theatre.

As discussed, 1*4–18 Company 2* was not representative of city dynamics; of the 18 young people who completed a questionnaire 15 identified as being white British, 1 as being White and Asian and 2 as having any other white background. Rhys McClelland noted, "Birmingham might become the first black majority city in Britain, and actually we're far, far from becoming the first black majority youth theatre in Britain". The narrow representation of class was noted by Rhys also. As someone from outside of Birmingham, he had noticed the lack of 'Brummie' accents in the youth theatre: "I know it's strange to go by accents because there are a lot of native Birmingham people in the Young REP, but it's not a Brummie Youth theatre is it?". Steve Ball explained that they had begun to address these discrepancies as a priority.

There were a complex variety of reasons why this was the case, as explored in the previous two case studies. Some of the members of *14–18 Company 2* were aware of the issue. Eighteen year-old Eve saw that the lack of publicity was a problem which kept the Young REP middle class:

> The majority of people who go and see theatre at The REP are white, middle class people and that is how they find out about The REP and that's how they go on the website and find out about youth theatre […]If it looks like we're not inclusive then they're not going to want to go there.

The group had a very close relationship to the building due to having rehearsed there for many years. To demonstrate the intensity of the attachment, Rhys spoke about the reaction of those young people to the temporary closure of the building:

> There are some young people that actually, when the theatre closed, were distraught, very upset that this building that they grew up in was going to be inaccessible for two years. They're very much a part of the building and they own it in a particular way.

It is logical that more sustained access to a space will build more memories, which will increase the sense of belonging; (Relph 1976, p. 49, in Cresswell 2004, p. 44). However, when the chair was placed in the centre of the room with the statement 'I am The REP theatre', and they were asked to step in to build the picture, the responses were exceptionally specific and detailed. Many of them elicited responses from the rest of the group including recognition, laughter and affection:

> I am Rehearsal Room 1, I am Bob in Stage Door, I am Bob and Babs (*some ahh's from others*), I'm the doors where we got locked in (*laughter*), I am the trap door in the stage, I am the stage, I'm the bar where we said goodbye to Tim, I'm the Green Room, I'm the stairs where we had to wait when we were locked in, I'm the costume department, I'm the old *Musicals* practice room, I'm the warm chairs in stage door (*A few low level, 'ahhs' and 'so warm'*), I'm Robin the Stage Manager, I'm the piano in the rehearsal room, I am the plant at Stage Door, I am the leaflets at Stage Door, I am Emma's Mum (who worked in the costume department), I'm department X where they keep all the animal hats, I'm the water dispenser, I'm someone Front of House doing a flash mob.

In response to the photographs, a group of them had taken of the theatre before it went dark, the freeze frames that the young people created were incredibly detailed, including "the clock that didn't work", "the corridor that always smelt of paint" and "the good feeling that they got inside" when at the theatre. A plethora of stories emerged from the tableaux, including being accidentally locked in a staircase, a Christmas party on the Mezzanine and being soaking wet in a past performance. All members responded with recognition to each other's memories and evocative descriptions.

6 Conclusion

This research chimes with Edward Relph's assertion that, "to be inside a place is to belong to it and identify with it, and the more profoundly inside you are the stronger is the identity with the place" (Relph 1976, p. 49, in Cresswell 2004, p. 44) The issue for The REP was that the young people who were profoundly identifying with the theatre were far from being representative of city demographics. Although the groups in Small Heath and Shenley had widened participation with the youth

theatre, they had not equalised the relationship that the groups had with the actual theatre building.

Hannah Phillips explained during her interview and over the course of the field work the strategies for diversifying the Young REP. This included turning the waiting list into a database, doubling the provision, outreach work, changing the style and content of the work produced to make it more exciting and accessible, looking at the branding of the Young REP and encouraging more opportunities for the young people to have their voices heard. Coinciding with the end of Natalie's field work, in August 2011, Hannah Phillips left The REP to take up a full time post at Birmingham School of Acting, to be replaced by Jessica Farmer. Following the trajectory of Hannah Phillips' work to diversify the Young REP, and responding to these research findings, Jessica and her team have achieved the transformation from two majority white, middle class city centre based groups that did not represent Birmingham, to four groups of young people from a range of ethnicities that are much more representative of the city. The first action that she had taken was to double the provision of the groups based in the centre and fill most of the places from the database with those young people who had patiently been waiting years for the opportunity to be involved. She worked with the host school, Birmingham Ormiston Academy (BOA) (where rehearsals now take place) to fast track some of their students. The intake at BOA is from across the city and the region, and thus fairly representative of Birmingham. Secondly, the youth theatre directors ran workshops in schools in targeted, unrepresented areas and offered the first five people to sign up for the Young REP a voucher for a free term. Thirdly, the youth theatre directors identified young people that were interested in joining the central Young REP groups from *Shenley* and *Small Heath.* Fourthly, Jessica formed a new Young REP group at Harborne Academy, and, due to the demographic of the school, all of these members are from BAME backgrounds. Lastly, as a part of a strategy to unify the work of the Young REP, Jessica took an idea from Natalie's interim report and organised a Young REP festival for July, 2013.

Raynsford (2010) notes in *Inclusive Youth Theatre*, that although most youth theatres consider themselves welcome and open to everyone, in order to actually be so in practice, they need to put appropriate support structures in place. She comments that " […] ensuring your doors are metaphorically open is not enough" (p. 9). Youth theatres that are attached to theatre buildings have the additional barrier of the theatre architecture itself (Nicholson 2011, p. 209). This chapter has shown that young people can feel a very deep sense of belonging and ownership inside a theatre building once granted access, but it has also demonstrated that young people who are from BAME and/or working class backgrounds can find this access harder to achieve than those from white, middle class backgrounds. The REP has implemented a wide range of strategies to address this inequality of access, and continues to do so. The young people from *Small Heath Young REP* and *Shenley Academy Young REP* explained that the practice of establishing Young REP groups in chosen communities was paramount to them accessing youth theatre provision and establishing a relationship with The REP. Both groups stated that they would not have known about the Young REP groups based at the theatre, and that its school base had

given them the sense that they had a 'right' to be there. As Zahid noted, "[…] because it's our school you feel some ownership over it. That you do belong there". *Shenley Young REP's* community base allowed the youth theatre directors to tailor the provision to the needs of the young people in an area with high levels of disenfranchisement, as the style of youth theatre delivery will probably need to differ from work with young people with higher levels of self-esteem (Raynsford 2010, p. 34). In Small Heath it provided a safety zone to explore theatre in a community where, for many residents, it was not culturally the norm. However, there is still more work to be done to strengthen the relationship between these satellite groups and the theatre building, and to diversify access to the groups that are based in the city centre so ensuring that the Young REP is accessible to a wide variety of young people is an ongoing project for the theatre.

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