


## Article

# Permission to Cry—Drifts on Research Based Theatre on Top of an Elephant

Emilio Méndez-Martínez <sup>1,\*</sup>, Esther Uria-Iriarte <sup>2</sup> and Montserrat González Parera <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Faculty of Teacher Training and Education, University of Oviedo, 33005 Oviedo, Spain

<sup>2</sup> Faculty of Education, Philosophy and Anthropology, Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea (The University of the Basque Country), 20018 Donostia-San Sebastián, Spain; mariaesther.uria@ehu.eus

<sup>3</sup> Performing Arts Pedagogy Department, Institut del Teatre de Barcelona (The Theatre Institute of Barcelona), 08004 Barcelona, Spain; gonzalezpm@institutdelteatre.cat

\* Correspondence: emiliomendezmartinez@gmail.com

**Abstract:** This article aims to propose a critical reflection on what it means to be a professional of drama-based practices. To do so, we promote a process of cooperative creation and research based on our own doubts, contradictions, and concerns about the different roles we play in our practice. The results of this process are presented in artistic form, using dramatic language and metaphor as doors to new spaces for reflection.

**Keywords:** research based theatre; arts based research; theatre; research

## 1. Prologue

One of the most important opportunities and challenges facing art-based research is not only to be recognized as a rigorous research methodology, but also to be valued in relation to its potential in the different phases of research.

The process of elaboration of this article tries to exemplify how artistic media can complement scientific analysis, fleeing from the search for unequivocal conclusions and embracing the problematization of reality through questioning (Lipman 2001). In this sense, we draw on the following related terms: arts-informed research (Knowles and Cole 2008), arts-based research (Barone and Eisner 2012; Leavy 2009; Liamputtong and Rumbold 2008; McNiff and Speiser 2004), and arts research (Wadsworth Hervey 2000).

The defining quality of arts-based research is the empirical use of artistic experimentation (McNiff 2014). In this sense, we have conducted artistic experimentation as the primary mode for both the enquiry process and the communication of the final writing. We have completed this experimentation first-hand.

We understand this field as a real and symbolic space for a whole community of artists, including all the arts. In this work, we focus specifically on the performing arts and make an exercise of form and content to express ourselves creatively using dramatic dialogue as the main means to convey messages, explore emotions, and tell stories. This work tells a story that encompasses a diverse range of experimental and multidisciplinary forms that integrate visual, sound, and movement elements. As the poetic dialogue progresses, our artistic intelligences are pitted against each other to solve problems and understand real situations that suggest rather than affirm.

Our starting point is a residency for practitioners of Theatre Applied to Education and Research that took place in March 2023 in Olot (Catalonia, Spain). During this residency, we gathered researchers, artists, and practitioners from all over the world (Canada, United States, United Kingdom, Norway, France, and Spain). The aim was to share experiences and knowledge about practices related to theatre as a tool for socio-educational intervention and research. In particular, the umbrella term “Research based Theatre” [RbT] (Belliveau and Lea 2016) was discussed, which is defined as “a novel method for disseminating research



**Citation:** Méndez-Martínez, Emilio, Esther Uria-Iriarte, and Montserrat González Parera. 2024. Permission to Cry—Drifts on Research Based Theatre on Top of an Elephant. *Arts* 13: 45. <https://doi.org/10.3390/arts13020045>

Academic Editors: George Belliveau, Joe Salvatore and Kathryn Dawson

Received: 31 August 2023

Revised: 19 February 2024

Accepted: 21 February 2024

Published: 27 February 2024



**Copyright:** © 2024 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

into a methodology that has a potential to simultaneously gather, analyze, and disseminate data" (Lea and Belliveau 2020, p. 1).

This experience proved to be an intense journey both professionally and personally. The activities were not limited to the intellectual, but, true to RbT, all enquiry and reflection was sifted through the sieve of action, of drama. Undoubtedly, the activities affected us emotionally. Thus, there was a key moment that caught the attention of Esther: after finishing a certain activity, one of the participants tried to hold back tears by spontaneously expressing: "Enough! I'm a professional, come on!" At that point, Esther asked a question that was our starting point: "What does it mean to be a professional researcher?"

Alluding to the importance of opening spaces for reflection on professional practice, as suggested by Schön (1992), Esther invited us to construct a dramatic dialogue around reflections that might arise around this question.

We live in different locations (Catalonia, Asturias, and the Basque Country). As such, we decided that our work system would be based on the Zoom platform as a medium, as well as on a shared document in Google Drive, which would be nourished by individual contributions and transcriptions of our conversations.

Our first meeting involved a complex dialogue about the common focus of the article. We decided to establish Salvatore's (2018) pentagon as a starting point for two purposes: (1) to inquire about the different roles we should assume as RbT practitioners, and (2) to reflect on RbT practice itself, expressing the contradictions that may arise in relation to academic demands.

It was decided that our system of work would follow a methodology that we call "snowballing". We know that this term is more strictly used as sampling in qualitative methodologies, i.e., as a technique for finding research subjects, in which one subject provides the researcher with the name of another subject, who in turn provides the name of a third, and so on (Atkinson and Flint 2001). However, our intention was that one idea provided would lead to another and so on. Midway through the process, the idea of a puzzle was introduced as a metaphor for the research methodology that was naturally emerging.

This concept also has its own conceptualization within collaborative learning (Carrillo Zenteno and Vintimilla 2021), but we conceive it as a methodology of non-linear creation of a theatrical text, defying temporal sequence, convincingly confronting confusion as a crucial aesthetic element with the intention again of generating questions rather than transmitting certainties (Hearing and Jones 2018). In this sense, we find concomitances with the theatre of the absurd of Samuel Beckett, Eugène Ionesco, and, especially, the Spanish playwright and screenwriter Fernando Arrabal.

In short, we assumed a flexible system of creation, an aesthetic that vehemently embraced imbalance and even lack of structure at times, based on Debord's (1958) concept of "drift", and an approach that assumes research into "lo que no se puede decir, lo que no se sabe decir"<sup>1</sup>, as the Spanish poet José Hierro said when he was asked about the idiosyncrasies of poetry (Canal Uned 2013).

We took it as a disruptive potential (Ribero 2018), as a space of active disorientation, of disengagement from what grounds us, as well as a way of awakening the senses in another way (Rubin 2012). This drift began with a proposed monologue by Emilio, which in turn provoked the subsequent contributions of dramatic writing. A sort of continuity materialized in a series of monologues inspired by Salvatore's (2018) vertices of the pentagon. Salvatore's pentagon theory differentiates five vertices to consider in order to conduct RbT: researcher, interview-participant, actor, character, and audience. In addition, Belliveau's (2016) triangle theory was considered, whose vertices represented the following: participants-community, researchers/mediators, and artists. Finally, these monologues were interspersed with dialogues, representative of authentic conversations between us.

Consequently, aesthetic decisions were emerging from this drift. The monologues approach poetic prose and the dialogued parliaments approach the genre of the absurd in allusion to the theatre of Boutler (2008) or Arrabal (Santos Sánchez 2014), by means of more direct parliaments between the characters and from them to the audience. We decided not

to include too many annotations, especially about the monologue part, once again with the intention of generating questions from the own experience of the reader.

### **Soneto**

En Olot el pentágono asoma,  
bola de nieve y puzzle con inercia,  
investigación y arte de esencia,  
vuela libre y honesta la paloma.  
El elefante y su cromosoma  
espacio de entre zonas evidencia  
la incertidumbre como licencia,  
sobrevuela sobre dogma y doma.  
¿Y entonces cuál es la puerta  
de este laberinto sin salida?  
Solo mil preguntas sin respuesta.  
El rugir de esta contradicción  
es el arte, con su ida y venida.  
Es la vida: mente y corazón.

### **Sonnet**

In Olot the pentagon peeps out,  
snowball and puzzle with inertia,  
research and art of essence,  
the dove flies free and honest.  
The elephant and its chromosome  
space between zones, evidence  
of uncertainty as license,  
flies over dogma and taming.  
And then what is the door  
of this labyrinth with no way out?  
Only a thousand questions without any answer.  
The roar of this contradiction  
is art, with its comings and goings.  
It is life: mind and heart.

### *Dramatis Personae*

Esther Uria Iriarte. A 53 year old woman. Actor, teacher, and researcher. Passionate, reflective, and analytical. Doubt as part of her essence. Creative, witty, and with a great sense of humor. Structured to destructure, organized to disorganize. She likes to play between the margins of the rigorous and the most bizarre. Intolerant of injustice but with a great tolerance for “pata negra”, Iberian ham.

Emilio Méndez Martínez. A 44 year old man. Artist, teacher, and researcher. Emilio is charismatic, obsessive, creative, and very sensitive. He is always doing and thinking about several things at the same time, and he does not conceive of limits when it comes to solving the questions that interest or concern him, especially if they have to do with human beings.

Montserrat Martínez Parera. A 44 year old woman. Catalan. Psychologist and theatre director. Multilingual and curious about knowledge. Sympathetic and combative. Sensitive, resilient, and versatile. Elegant and self-confident. Passionate about the sea.

## **2. Introduction**

*(The following words are projected on the cyclorama in the theatre).*

The Spanish actor Javier Bardem said that while he was making the film *Vicky Cristina Barcelona*, directed by Woody Allen, he used to ask the New York director to repeat some takes to try to improve his performance, to which Allen always replied that it was not necessary. Tired of this situation, one day Bardem asked him: “What if an elephant passes

behind the shot?" To which Allen replied: it would be wonderful if an elephant passed behind (Fotogramas 2021).

*(A darkened stage. As each character speaks, the spotlight will illuminate their faces. It is a bare stage, where the audience can see the walls of the theatre, the spotlights, the stage machinery, etc. However, the light will be expressive and will accompany the different moments of the performance, creating distinct atmospheres.)*

ESTHER: To start working, I need a work structure. Or a working system. . .

EMILIO: Well. . . the structure can be the non-structure.

ESTHER: I'm talking about putting a stimulus, a *leitmotiv* that challenges us, that pushes us to say something that will lead to the emergence of other aspects.

EMILIO: That is. . . what do you think if instead of going on talking about it, I start by writing a text that has occurred to me, you read it and see what inspires you?

ESTHER: Great. We have a first concrete stimulus which is the pentagon<sup>2</sup>, maybe it's about letting ourselves go and building together a kind of snowball effect?

MONTSERRAT: Okay. That's fine with me.

EMILIO: Watch out! It can also be like when you do a puzzle, you suddenly find a piece that is in the opposite corner, you place it and continue that way.

MONTSERRAT: From. . . snowball-puzzle?

ESTHER: That can be the name for our WhatsApp chat that way. . . and continue to see what happens.

### **Tear 1**

#### **THE RESEARCHER**

EMILIO: Where am I? Everything is so dark; I can barely see my hands in front of me. It is cold. It is difficult to move forward: everything is very narrow and damp. This is not a place to spend much time in. I must look for a way out. . . a light.

I think I've already passed this way. No, wait. . . Maybe I have. Does it matter? Maybe I should stop, but there's something pushing me to find a way out.

...

This reminds me of school. I'd forgotten it. The teacher showed us an experiment. He planted a seed in a small pot, which he put into a completely dark labyrinth. As the days went by, a plant grew in the direction of the light. That plant didn't know it was looking for the light, but it did. I need to understand to find the light. To understand where I am, whether I have been here before, what the right path is, whether there is more than one right path, whether there is one that is wrong, whether I am circling back on myself, and perhaps also, in a very special way, how I got here. To answer some of these questions, I may have to stop. But for others of them I am sure I must move. And on the other hand, where is the labyrinth in which I find myself? I mean, if I manage to get out of it, where will I appear? In the middle of nowhere, perhaps? Or, on the other hand, will I meet a lot of people when I get out? Will my experience be of help to people who find themselves in this or other labyrinths in the future? What does it mean to be of help? Is it of any use to be of help? I don't know. . . I don't know what to think. I'm very confused. I think I've been here before. I think I see a light. . . Oh no! It's a reflection! Damn it! But if there's a reflection, that means there must be a light. Therefore, I must go in the opposite direction to where I saw that reflection. I already have a reference. I will go there. Maybe it's one of those hypothetical wrong paths, maybe it's one of the right ones. I will discover it on the move. I am adrift.

ESTHER: Just a moment. . .

*(All the stage lights come on abruptly).*

EMILIO: But why did you interrupt, Esther? *(To the audience)* I was already so into. . .

ESTHER: I'm sorry... I didn't mean to interrupt. It was perfect. Shall we go back to the research question...?

EMILIO: But we are doing just that, facing the question, and getting lost in it.

ESTHER: Yes, I know. I know. I know. But I was thinking of a dramatic dialogue counterpoint to give it more rhythm... A bit more colloquial language. (*To the audience*) By the way, where are you? (*To Emilio and Montserrat*) Well, I'm realizing that asking about our research question was just an excuse to continue in another way on the aesthetic level... Montserrat! Where are you?

MONTSERRAT (*audience lights come on*): Sorry... I was looking at the sea... it's so beautiful... Let's see... Let's focus. When we said goodbye to Faber-Olot<sup>3</sup> we left with a big question, remember: what does it mean to be a researcher-artist-practitioner?

ESTHER: Indeed. We are going to establish a dialogue around certainties and non-certainties... We have nothing clear. (*To the audience*) Or am I wrong?

EMILIO: Indeed, we are not clear. But I think we should be clear that we will never be clear.

MONTSERRAT: Inspiring...

EMILIO: That is the question. I think this consists of walking a path trying to find something knowing that we won't find it. I don't know if art is anything more than that. Well, if you need a map to travel that road, how about Salvatore's pentagon? ([Salvatore 2018](#)).

MONTSERRAT: I found Salvatore's pentagon inspiring. Also, the triangle we worked on with Belliveau<sup>4</sup> at FABERLLULL. But I have a lot of questions: How do the vertices relate to each other? Are there established paths or can each time be a labyrinth?

ESTHER: Maybe the vertices make up the geometry of this labyrinth.

EMILIO: Well, that's it... A labyrinth... A search for light... Loss... Confusion... Truth... Lies... Metaphor. Everything happens in a different place than in real life... It's genius!

ESTHER: A space of searching, of imprecision, of uncertainty... Another space that is more real than reality itself. (*To the audience*) Sorry if it's not clear. (*To Emilio and Montserrat*) I wonder if at the time of putting it in front of the audience: wouldn't we need a language... how to say it... Basically more colloquial way? more accessible? ([Leavy 2009](#); [Cole and Knowles 2008](#)).

MONTSERRAT: I find it super-inspiring, Esther.

ESTHER: I mean, yes... Starting with a monologue has created a metaphor for sure. Well, I let myself be carried away by certain mandates from the Arts-Based Research (ABR) that ordered me to "cut at the appropriate moment in order to interrupt the cathartic flow of the audience" ([Salvatore 2018](#)). What the hell, why am I justifying myself? I interrupted the monologue following a personal aesthetic impulse, as I said before.

EMILIO: Esther, do you mean the... *Verfremdungseffekt*...? ([Brecht 2004](#)).

MONTSERRAT (*to the audience*): Distancing effect.

EMILIO: But why are we talking about this? Why did we cut it off? I mean, I don't understand why we are cutting the flow of what was going on to talk about how well the flow of what was going on was going on. (*To audience*) Maybe I have been able to show something that she didn't know about herself... and that she doesn't want to know?

ESTHER (*to the audience*): Maybe. . . it takes me to places in which I feel oppression. . . Those places, indeed, labyrinthine. . . of contradictions. . . of questions with no immediate exit. . .

EMILIO (*to the audience*): It would be nice to know the reason for this oppression. I'll ask her elegantly later, you'll see.

ESTHER: Sorry for being a spoilsport. Let's see. . . the interpretation, the intentionality, everything was truthful and aesthetic. . . I really liked that movement you made towards the light with the frozen image. A very suggestive beginning to start getting lost.

MONTSERRAT: Yes, and starting with a monologue can be a pertinent beginning, can't it? Directly. Without concealment. Showing the deepest of our feelings as researchers. Without fear of judgment and without the need to ask permission for anything. So. . . How do we go on?

*(The three of them look at the audience and freeze and answer in a roundabout way).*

ESTHER: I don't know. . .

EMILIO: I don't know. . . ! That's the good thing!

MONTSERRAT: . . . I don't know. . . ? I'm going to the library to look it up.

*(Pause).*

EVERYBODY: Let's go on!

ESTHER: Could we include another monologue now? As a possibility. Here goes!

## **Tear 2**

### **ACTOR**

ESTHER: The movement takes me to some lights that are appearing on the stage. Fireflies, they are fireflies. I look in the background and see an audience submerged in darkness. I don't see it, but I observe it. I walk towards those lights that lead me to a space between zones. That space of truthful fiction and that truthfulness which is fantasy. The search for light becomes action, with an objective? What objective? A step. Another light now points to this action that I must undertake. In a place between limits, that gives me vertigo. The only way out is courage and movement towards that position marked by the light on stage. I observe the outside and I observe myself, external and internal scenes converse.

My head becomes an animal with several heads that coexist, overlap, and fight in the instant that lasts a second. . . I talk and I observe myself talking. I observe myself walking. I observe myself thinking. I observe myself observing. . . Moreover, in the background the gaze of an audience that looks for a reflection in my action. I open my mouth and say a word. The thought struggles between the present moment and the care of the form. "Don't think, don't think", I say to myself. "What is thought, is thought. . . Act". I keep walking through the labyrinth of the scene. . . between what I am and what I am not. Perhaps today the action will also discover something for me. The body is the one that knows and keeps track (Lecoq 2004, p. 52; Van der Kolk 2020).

*(Butterflies start to appear on the screen. The fireflies fly).*

MONTSERRAT (*returning from the library*): Guys, I'm getting lost. We need a compass to get our bearings. At least I need a compass. *(She takes the book out of her backpack)* I found a book that lays the groundwork for what you were talking about. What are we talking about? ABR? And what is it exactly? *(Checking the book).*

EMILIO: Yes, I knew about it when I was in Canada.

MONTSERRAT: Well, this book explains that ABR is a set of methodological tools used by qualitative researchers from all disciplines during all phases of social research, including data collection, analysis, interpretation, and representation.

These emerging tools adapt creative arts principles to address social research questions in a holistic and engaged way, interweaving theory and practice (Barone and Eisner 2006).

EMILIO: Monica Prendergast told me about the book when it was published, and I bought it.

ESTHER: Yes, I also found out about it in the same way. I remember that it impacted my way of thinking as a researcher. Let me have the book (*takes the book from his hands*).

(Pause).

MONTSERRAT: Yeah, you don't want to conceptualize. Sorry. You know I like to carry a compass to navigate. But if you prefer to sail adrift, wherever the wind takes you, go ahead. But keep in mind that. . .

ESTHER: No! It's not that. It's just that I'm a little nervous about having to go through there.

MONTSERRAT: Nervous? Does it make you nervous to stop to understand what's going on?

EMILIO: I think it's partly contradictory to conceptualize, but if you want, go ahead. I also find it very interesting to face this contradictory fact.

MONTSERRAT: Contradictory?

ESTHER: Totally contradictory.

EMILIO: Yes, contradictory because I think that the ABR is precisely to assume that confusion can also be the ultimate goal of a scientific research process.

ESTHER: Well. . . I don't know. . . Maybe it is not totally contradictory. On the one hand, I like to go down paths, indeed, from that "not thinking" and acting. But on the other hand, there are times when you must honor academia, right?

EMILIO: I think that the very process of "snowball-puzzle" will lead us to a spontaneous conceptualization without looking for it.

ESTHER: It is all about finding the balance. . . Negotiating.

EMILIO: You already know that the etymology of the word "negocio" comes from "nec" and "otium"<sup>5</sup>, that is, what is not leisure (understanding "leisure" as rest), and that it can also be understood as "not without reward". That is the basis of capitalist neoliberalism: what does not produce tends not to exist. Marx (Foucault 2012) already said it.

MONTSERRAT: I would say: to conceptualize or not to conceptualize. The terminology we use is important. The choice of words to create the discourse already gives a lot of information about the discourse itself and the frame of reference of the communication (Watzlawick 1981).

ESTHER: To quote or not to quote. . . What I am saying is that it makes me a little nervous that the demands of the academy break with the dramatic structure and that we become "talking heads" (Saldaña 2016, p. 35) caged in quotes. . . I choose to put, at least, some footnotes (Uria-Iriarte and Prendergast 2021), and still feel free.

EMILIO: Okay. I sometimes feel that referencing is a scam. The first time I thought of it was when I read Vigotsky's biography, and I learned that most of his conclusions are derived from work done with five children in his private practice. However, referencing Vigotsky gives you credibility in the academy. It is a bit of the neoliberal tendency towards scientism, which seeks to control the validation of opinions.

ESTHER: Many times, I have been stuck trying to support each of my contributions. “Who else is saying this?” A sometimes-crazy quest that becomes the main objective in pursuit of validity.

EMILIO: If everything must be referenced, then it is very difficult to contribute something new, or to say daring things that mobilize the debate<sup>6</sup>.

MONTSERRAT: Perhaps because of insecurity about the value of our contributions, we need to strengthen this communication. I often think about the reception of the audience, do you think about it? It’s not that I write while thinking of someone, but I ask myself who might be interested in all this. And depending on that audience I choose a language, a style and some quotes or others. Somehow, I hope that this audience will follow me and think that what I am saying is of interest to them, that they are not wasting their time. We know that the academy is a very demanding reader, and this forces us to demonstrate certainty, to try to do so or to appear to do so.

ESTHER: Yes, yes, of course. Everything we do has to do with the communication process. The question is how to understand that process.

EMILIO: I once spoke to a teacher to raise my doubts about a certain teaching strategy, to which she replied: “Oh! the children love it”. As I said to her, I don’t think that argument is enough to validate an intervention. What I mean. . . is that no one demands that a melody or a flower be “understandable” a priori. Both things simply are and their essences, simple and complex at the same time, produce reactions. If those reactions are not produced, probably the “fault” lies not in the music or the flower, but in those who pass by them without stopping to wonder<sup>7</sup>. Perhaps the speed at which this neoliberal capitalist world is going makes this task very difficult and, contrary to what it might seem, I believe that the path to take is not to accommodate ourselves to a completely Cartesian language, as this capitalism demands, but to balance the issue by raising questions that can open our imaginary towards what seems that it can no longer be or what it still is not.

ESTHER (*to Emilio*): Yes, the question is in the balance through. . . perhaps. . . those questions that arise from. . . that space -and I hold on to the image of the flower, perfumed by uncertainty, and that uncertainty is good. Since it reveals aspects beyond logic. . . (*To the audience*) Now am I the one stretching out the speech? (*Back to Emilio and Montserrat*) A perfume that opens our imagination and that reveals aspects that reason cannot reveal.

(*An elephant crosses the stage through the forum*).

EMILIO: The perfume of “non-logic”.

MONTSERRAT: Or the “non-logical” logic. A perfume that cannot be, that can be, that is not yet. . . But that exists! Like a surviving firefly ([Didi-Huberman 1998](#)).

ESTHER: A perfume of. . . a space “between zones”?. . . ([Uria-Iriarte 2018](#)).

### Tear 3

#### AUDIENCE

EMILIO: She lived almost on the top of a mountain, in a lost village, some decades ago. Now nobody lives there anymore. That day she was late for school and in her haste, she dropped her book on the floor. When she picked it up, she discovered a row of ants. She was fascinated by the number of ants that made up that little path. On that distant spring day, she gazed at the disciplined formation that disappeared on the other side of a small wall. Just as she was about to make the mistake of thinking that all the ants were the same, she spotted one of them carrying a small piece of who knows what kind of food. She followed it patiently with her eyes. She silently contemplated every step of its long journey. Along the way it had to overcome some obstacles, sometimes going around them, sometimes over them, always with great effort. From time to time she came across other



ants returning to work after having already completed a delivery. And so she remained for hours, forgetting her obligation to go to school. She had never paid so much attention to anything before.

That girl was my mother. A few days ago, more than fifty years later, I happened to come across a second-hand book that explained the habits of ants in detail. I bought it and gave it to her, but she reacted in an unexpected way.

- Why do I want this, son?
- Well, mum, I thought you might like it because of what you told me about how much you loved watching ants when you were a girl.
- Aha! I understand! But what I liked was watching it, not reading about it.

EMILIO: Yes, yes, Esther, that place between zones is the space of the ineffable. Don't you love that word? It is a term used to describe what cannot be expressed in words, a box in which to put everything for which we have not been able to invent a specific box! This is a table, that is a chair. . . and everything else, the ineffable. The point here is that sublime and hateful language determines reality!

ESTHER: That's right. Language creates thought and thought in turn constructs the language that names and defines reality. It's fascinating! Consequently, what has not yet been named is not part of reality, even if it exists.

EMILIO: Art happens in that place. . . In that non-place, that is, in utopia<sup>8</sup>

ESTHER: And where do you think we are right now? (*She looks at the audience*) I can't see you. . . (*to Montserrat and Emilio*) Are you sure there's someone there watching us? (*To the audience*) Is anyone there?

MONTSERRAT: I don't know. . . (*She looks towards the back*) In our script we counted on at least one kind of audience or more.

ESTHER: We got stuck in monologues and reflections. . . Maybe they've left? It's possible that they didn't understand anything. . .

MONTSERRAT: Maybe they are waiting for an answer. Something more concrete. Let's not forget who we are addressing. The importance of the receiver. If there is no receiver, it is a game, not theatre. I am remembering my thesis director who always corrected me and told me to talk about games instead of theatre. I was studying the potentiality of theatre. Imagine how dramatic it was to see that we were not in the same conceptual framework. (*Pause*) I changed my thesis director.

EMILIO: You know what I'm thinking? That this is not a theatrical performance, but the script of a theatrical performance, which is very different, something like what happened with Magritte's pipe. So, there is neither audience nor stage. . . Just these words on a piece of paper. . . that you are reading.

ESTHER: Me?

EMILIO: I meant the person reading this right now. The right now of the person reading it. If you are that person, then yes, I meant you. We are still in the place of utopia. It is all the time about looking for a way out of the labyrinth, knowing for sure that it is impossible to get out.

MONTSERRAT: But you mean all this is a game? A lie?

EMILIO: Yes, of course. . . And truth at the same time. That's the space in which we keep moving. There are no answers. Actually, my mother never stared at those ants. Or did she?

MONTSERRAT: True, there are no answers, but there is still the act of receiving.

ESTHER: It's paradoxical. . . On the one hand we make an effort to represent something with a certain structure, coherence. . . but this dialogue of ours is the result of a process that represents the unfinished. . . ([Belliveau 2016](#); [Belliveau and Lea 2016](#)).

MONTSERRAT: The complexity, the tension. . .

ESTHER: The uncertainty. . . and even a certain degree of. . . chaos? (McNiff 2013, 2014).

ALL (*towards the audience*): Chaos.

(*They begin to walk around the stage erratically and from time to time stop to say the word "chaos"*).

EMILIO: I think it's great where we've come to. The great thing is that we have been eliminating all the handles, and there are fewer and fewer places to hold on to. It's like having been moving forward for a while, looking down and discovering that there's no ground under your feet.

ESTHER: For me, personally, our journey is awakening feelings that words and logic cannot explain. . . it's like walking through new landscapes that generate. . .

MONTSERRAT: More questions and more labyrinths.

EMILIO: What if there is nothing else?

(*A large tape recorder appears on the screen. Many voices are heard mixed together. The protagonists sit on the proscenium. They look straight ahead*).

#### **Tear 4**

#### **INTERVIEW-PARTICIPANT**

ESTHER: I listen. I wait for silence. I look at you. You look at me. I put on the recorder. I see your nervous look. It's going to be confidential. Calm. Uneasiness in your gaze and rotundity in my voice. I make sure it's recording. That "juicy" information that will build your story, your story, our story? And I ask myself: who is this impostor who stands in front of you, rightfully rummaging through your innermost recesses? What kind of key makes it possible for me to open this Pandora's box in you? Or is it in me? I feel that when you speak, you speak about me. When you touch the mystery of that open box, you are reading my world. And maybe that tempts the unfolding of my cry. . . because you speak of my own labyrinth. But I can't cry. I am a professional. . . or an imposter? What kind of petulance makes me think I have the right to access your secret box? . . . What is the insolence that leads me to think it is for the benefit of who knows what? Perhaps it is my own need. The search for answers to the unknown of my own labyrinth. The need to be saved through your voice. I ask permission to cry.

EMILIO: I don't know. . . Maybe we let ourselves be easily defeated by the mandates of the academy. What's more, I think that the same academy ends up valuing especially those proposals that go beyond what it itself promotes and expects.

ESTHER: Exactly, it values freedom. Maybe we should analyze what is the degree of freedom allowed. . . and why. What is that margin of freedom? Because freedom has its limits, doesn't it?

EMILIO: According to Joaquín Fuster, freedom is choosing what you want to do without harming anyone or yourself (Fuster 2022).

ESTHER: We can decide those limits during the process. . . Throughout the process. . . As we talk. . .

MONTSERRAT: But actually, I think there are not so many. We invent them to feel safe, so that this space is not an abyss. On the other hand, what if we address the issue of how to approach the research with respect to the people who participate?

ESTHER: Yes. . . But why the appearance of an elephant? I mean. . . I can intuit it.

EMILIO: I don't think that the question is "why an elephant?" The question is that the elephant is chosen because there is nothing that prevents choosing an elephant.

ESTHER: Wait, Emilio, didn't you say at our meeting something about Gómez de la Serna<sup>9</sup> giving a lecture on top of an elephant? Freedom is the size of an elephant?

MONTSERRAT: Or the immensity of the sea. Look at the waves. . . Look at the sea. . . Look how it flows. . . Let's trust in the process, in the drift.

ESTHER: Give me a little time. . . because right now I have nothing to say. I can't think of anything. And I think Montserrat is right, do we bring back the issue of interviewees?

EMILIO: Well, I think it's wonderful that you can't think of anything else to say. I'm sick to death of hearing shitty opinions daily, including mine<sup>10</sup>.

MONTSERRAT: Inspiring.

ESTHER: Emilio, although I would say it differently, I think the same, and I'm sorry for my opinion.

MONTSERRAT: So much talk about elephants, I just remembered the story of the elephant and the blind, do you know it?

ESTHER: I do. I usually use it in my classes at the University.

EMILIO: I don't, tell us.

MONTSERRAT: It's very well known. Once upon a time there were three old men, blind since birth, who one fine summer day gathered to chat near a river, as they used to do. Suddenly, they heard what sounded like footsteps. It was a farmer coming to water his elephant. The elders were surprised, they had heard stories about the existence of animals with that name, but they had never been in front of one of them. So, they politely asked the farmer if they could understand what an elephant actually is.

EMILIO: Oh, yes, yes. . . I know it.

ESTHER: Yes, it's very well known.

MONTSERRAT: Can I go on?

EMILIO: Yes, of course. Excuse me.

MONTSERRAT: The farmer agreed to the request of the elders, who approached and began to touch the animal. One of the elders touched the elephant's leg.

- Ah, an elephant is like the column of a building or the trunk of a tree! The second elder went to touch one of the animal's huge ears.
- What do you say! An elephant is like a fan, because of its shape and because when it moves it produces the same air as one of them. The third old man, however, ended up touching the trunk of the quadruped.
- You have no idea! An elephant is clearly like a rope and soft like a snake. And as the farmer and his elephant walked away, there the three elders stood, arguing about the definition of an elephant and what it is like. By the way, I think in the end we have forgotten to address the issue of care for the participants.

## **Tear 5**

### **THE CHARACTER**

*(This dialogue from *Luces de Bohemia*, by the Spanish author Ramón María del Valle Inclán, will be screened in the forum, reply to reply.)*

MAX: Las imágenes más bellas en un espejo cóncavo, son absurdas.

DON LATINO: Conforme. Pero a mí me divierte mirarme en los espejos de la Calle del Gato<sup>11</sup>.

MAX: Y a mí. La deformación deja de serlo cuando está sujeta a una matemática perfecta. Mi estética actual es transformar con matemática de espejo cóncavo, las normas clásicas [. . .]

MAX: Latino, deformemos la expresión en el mismo espejo que nos deforma las caras, y toda la vida miserable de España.<sup>12</sup>

ESTHER: The mathematics of the mirror gives me back the reflection of my deformed expression. A voice out of everyday life. Its concavity opens a crack towards the purity of an essence that escapes the fingers and the logical explanation of reason. It is a mathematics of affection that is born through an absurd impulse that wants to pass to the “side other”. That other non-space of the mirror where the smile cries and the cry laughs. There is no confusion. There is no loss. Only the coherent map of an aesthetic that crosses “the reality other” that is purer than reality itself. The reality of the mask. Not a real mask. The reflection of its gaze reveals aspects that reality itself rejects. The excess of the mask produces an echo that questions me? you? us? I look again through the mirror and discover the reality of an image exaggerated by my longings. But do I recognize myself? Is it me? Or am I another? I reach out my arm because I want to touch that image in front of me. I want to touch the tip of her nose. As I get closer, that long nose approaches haughtily. We are face to face. What? What are you doing? She laughs at me. License then. I laugh with her.

MONTSERRAT: These monologues are somewhat abstract. . . Should we add explanations? Perhaps here we could talk about Aby Warburg or Walter Benjamin? (*Emilio and Esther look at her*).

MONTSERRAT: All right, all right. . . We are not going to conceptualize. We don’t want to give explanations. . .

EMILIO: Explanations like “this means. . .”? I spent high school trying to figure out what those poems meant to the teachers. Then I got tired of thinking.

ESTHER: It’s understanding from “affection”. There are truths that only the aesthetics of art can reflect, and it doesn’t need any further explanation, just a feeling. . .

EMILIO: Of course! And in fact, I would like to comment that, specifically you, Esther, I think you have been dropping more and more passionately into Alice’s hole until you wrote monologues like this one about the character, which I think is amazing.

ESTHER: At the beginning, it’s not that I needed an iron structure to tie us down. . . but the structure of deconstructing. . . (*To the audience*) this is becoming like a tongue twister.

EMILIO: A working system. Yes, yes, you said it just like that at the beginning.

ESTHER: That’s right. I needed. . . and when I talk about me, I talk about us I think. . . a beginning of a path, a starting point to then give ourselves to the creative drift ([Debord 1958](#)) in which we have immersed ourselves. And this has been the system of our work together. I look back and we are on that horizon where I wanted to be. We wanted to be. Our drifting has generated our own structure with its own specificity. Unique. Our own.

EMILIO: Wow, how interesting! Here I’m going to have to be annoying, as you call me, Esther.

ESTHER: I’m joking!

EMILIO: I know! Let’s see. . . From my perspective I have felt that at a certain moment you were reassured to decide on a structure in the article: monologue-dialogue-monologue. . .

ESTHER: I qualify, that this structure emerged because of the process.

EMILIO: Of course, of course, of course. That’s why I think that since we have started to break structures and the three of us have noticed that no proposal was judged that all of them were useful, I think that each time we have been progressively deconstructing ourselves, in a way, we have been giving ourselves permission to cry, as you said in the monologue, Esther. That is the feeling I have.

MONTSERRAT: Aren't we falling into our own justification?

ESTHER: I don't know... Maybe?

EMILIO: I don't believe it. I really don't believe in anything, and I defend that above all else.

ESTHER: Are we going to explain about the elephant?

ALL (*looking at each other, to the audience*): Never!

EMILIO: Esther, what you have written and what you attribute to the three of us creates a contradiction in my mind. I would not say "never" never, just as I would never say "always". Let's see... I mean... Going back to what I said before... I believe that everything can be explained. The question is what we mean by explaining. I don't know if I'm making myself clear...

ESTHER: Okay... I got carried away with leaving the unknown... the open... I got carried away. I will change it.

ALL: Maybe yes... maybe no... maybe never... maybe always.

ESTHER: Do you like it like this?

EMILIO: Everything has been like an attempt to give form to what can't have form. It's like developing a question mark for 9063 words.

MONTSERRAT: That could be the title for the article, just a question mark, what do you think?

ESTHER: I think it's a good idea, but I like the one we already have better.

MONTSERRAT: Yeah, me too.

EMILIO: Ok. But why?

ESTHER: I don't know, probably because of the need to be in the margins. The aesthetics itself that guides us through spaces of deconstructing. Permission to dream. Permission to play. Permission to feel (Bracket 2019)... Again: Permission to cry.

EMILIO: When Aute<sup>13</sup> was asked how he created his songs, whether he started with the lyrics or the music, with the form or the content, he answered: the form is the content for me.

*(The three of them, Esther, Montserrat and Emilio, advance towards the proscenium and, with difficulty, manage to see the audience, which is made up entirely of elephants. As it slowly becomes dark, five questions are projected consecutively:*

- *When we say "investigate", what exactly do we mean? What do we mean by it?*
- *If science determines reality, what does art do?*
- *How much distance is there between you and your professional self?*
- *Why are we afraid of confusion?*
- *Who or what do you have to ask for permission to cry?.*

### 3. Epilogue

The question that drove this research was: what does it mean to be a professional in the academic world? This question triggered many other questions that became concrete at the end of the article in those last five projected questions. Each responds to lines of questioning that we encountered during the research, posed in the form of a theatrical libretto based on the Pentagon theory by Joe Salvatore (2018) and the Triangle theory by George Belliveau (2016).

"When we say "investigate", what exactly do we mean? What do we mean by it?" With this double questioning, we intend to delve into some ideas: Should we differentiate between scientific and artistic research? What differentiates them? What unites them? How can they complement each other? In short, with these questions we aim to stimulate

reflection on the epistemology of Arts Based Research and, consequently, of Research Based Theatre.

The question “If science determines reality, what does art do?” tries to open a door to reflection on the essence of art: why did human beings invent what they call art? And why is what they invented so important? The concept of art has varied throughout history (Tolstoi 1999), but one essence has always remained the same despite the changes. Why? What does art contribute that science cannot?

“How much distance is there between you and your professional self?”, is an invitation to delve deeper into the dichotomy, perhaps paradigmatic of the previous one, between the personal and the professional, to enable a reflection on how the neoliberal capitalist system almost necessarily entails an unnatural alienation (Foucault 2012).

“Why are we afraid of confusion?” We pose this question, which is related to the format of our article, but, at the same time, we intend it to be representative of human life itself, and each of the spheres that compose it. By dislocating the concept “confusion” out of the pejorative, we thereby try to confront it with others such as “certainty”, “normative”, “good”, “right”, etc., to question all of them as they are ultimately inherited qualifications of the capitalist system in which most Western societies live (Peters and Olssen 2011).

“Who or what do you have to ask for permission to cry?” raises the question of what forces, personal and social, limit the freedom of each human being to express themselves freely, beyond the identity that they have shaped through trial and error.

**Author Contributions:** Conceptualization, E.M.-M., E.U.-I. and M.G.P.; Methodology, E.M.-M., E.U.-I. and M.G.P.; Investigation, E.M.-M., E.U.-I. and M.G.P.; Writing—original draft, E.M.-M., E.U.-I. and M.G.P.; Writing—review & editing, E.M.-M., E.U.-I. and M.G.P.; Supervision, E.M.-M., E.U.-I. and M.G.P. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Data Availability Statement:** No new data were created or analyzed in this study. Data sharing is not applicable to this article.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The authors declare no conflict of interest.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> “what cannot be said, what is not known to say”.

<sup>2</sup> Salvatore (2018). It refers to the pentagon whose vertices represent: researcher, interview-participant, actor, character, and audience.

<sup>3</sup> Collective Residency in FABERLULL, Olot (Catalunya) in March 2023. *Research based Theatre, Pedagogy, Diversity*.

<sup>4</sup> Session led by George Belleveau at the FABERLULL residency (*Research based Theatre, Pedagogy, Diversity*) for researchers and practitioners in Applied Theatre and Research Based Theatre (RBT). The dynamics of the session were articulated around the stimulus of the triangle whose vertices represented the following: Participants-Community; Researchers/Mediators; Artists.

<sup>5</sup> In Spanish, the same word is used to refer to both negotiating and business, which is “negocio”.

<sup>6</sup> Méndez-Martínez 2024. This article you are reading.

<sup>7</sup> Méndez-Martínez 2024. This article you are reading, a little further down than before.

<sup>8</sup> Etymologically, *utopia* was formed from “ou” (not) and “topos” (place), that is, “the non-place”.

<sup>9</sup> Ramón Gómez de la Serna on an elephant (2 November 2023): <https://efs.efeservicios.com/foto/espana-homenaje-gomez-serna/8000448939>, accessed on 2 November 2023

<sup>10</sup> CANADA Editorial (2016). (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5FNZoT-DMc>, accessed on 2 November 2023).

<sup>11</sup> The name of a street in Madrid.

<sup>12</sup> *Luces de Bohemia (Bohemian Lights)*, a play in Spanish literature, written by Ramón María del Valle Inclán, creator of the Esperpento.

MAX: The most beautiful images in a concave mirror are absurd.

DON LATINO: Agreed. But it amuses me to look at myself in the mirrors of Cat Street.

MAX: It amuses me too. Deformation ceases to be deformation when it's subject to perfect mathematics. My current aesthetic is to transform the classical norms with concave mirror mathematics. [. . .]

MAX: Latino, let's deform expression in the same mirror that deforms our faces and all the miserable life of Spain.

<sup>13</sup> Spanish singer-songwriter.

## References

- Atkinson, Rowland, and John Flint. 2001. Accessing Hidden and Hard-to-Reach Populations: Snowball Research Strategies. *Social Research Update* 33: 1–5.
- Barone, Tom, and Elliot Eisner. 2006. Arts-Based Educational Research. In *Handbook of Complementary Methods in Educational Research*. Edited by Judith Green, Caroline Grego and Patricia Elmore. Washington, DC: aERa, pp. 95–109.
- Barone, Tom, and Elliot Eisner. 2012. *Arts Based Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Belliveau, George. 2016. Performing autobiography. In *Research-Based Theatre: An Artistic Methodology*. Edited by George Belliveau and Graham Lea. Chicago: Intellect, pp. 175–88.
- Belliveau, George, and Graham Lea. 2016. *Research-Based Theatre: An Artistic Methodology*. Chicago: Intellect.
- Boutler, Jonathan. 2008. *Beckett: A Guide for the Perplexed*. London and New York: Continuum.
- Bracket, Marc. 2019. *Permission ón to Feel: Unlocking the Power of Emotions to Help Our Kids, Ourselves, and Our Society Thrive*. New York: Celadon Books.
- Brecht, Bertolt. 2004. *Escritos Sobre Teatro*. Barcelona: Alba.
- CANADA Editorial. 2016. Los Punsetes—Opinión de mierda. [Video]. Youtube, 5 April. Available online: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N5FNZoT-DMc> (accessed on 1 December 2023).
- Canal Uned [UNED Documentos]. 2013. Rincón literario: Poetas españoles contemporáneos: José Hierro [Video]. Youtube, 1 April. Available online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7SQL\\_7mHeU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B7SQL_7mHeU) (accessed on 7 November 2023).
- Carrillo Zenteno, José Antonio, and Aida Diana Ormazá Vintimilla. 2021. Análisis del método ABP y la técnica del rompecabezas de Aronson aplicado a la enseñanza de los sistemas de información. Artículo original. *Revista Killkana Sociales* 5: 11–22.
- Cole, Ardra. L., and J. Gary Knowles. 2008. Arts-Informed Research. In *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*. Edited by Gary Knowles and Andra Cole. Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, pp. 55–71. [CrossRef]
- Debord, Guy. 1958. Teoría da Deriva. *Internationale Situationniste* 2: 54–57. Available online: <https://bibliotecaanarquista.org/library/guy-debord-teoria-da-deriva> (accessed on 15 November 2023).
- Didi-Huberman, Georges. 1998. *Supervivencia de las Luciérnagas*. Madrid: Bada Editores.
- Fotogramas. 2021. Javier Bardem Repasa sus 10 Mejores Películas y nos Cuenta Todos los Secretos de sus Personajes. [Video]. Youtube, 20 October. Available online: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx\\_cRTN-mQo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx_cRTN-mQo) (accessed on 19 November 2023).
- Foucault, Michel. 2012. *Vigilar y castigar. Nacimiento de la prisión*. Madrid: Siglo XXI.
- Fuster, Joaquín. 2022. *Cerebro y Libertad. Los Cimientos Cerebrales de Nuestra Capacidad Para Elegir*. Barcelona: Planeta.
- Hearing, Trevor, and Kip Jones. 2018. Chapter twenty-two: Film as Research/Research as Film. In *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*. Edited by Patricia Leavy. New York: The Guilford Press.
- Knowles, Gary, and Ardra Cole, eds. 2008. *Handbook of the Arts in Qualitative Research: Perspectives, Methodologies, Examples, and Issues*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Lea, Graham, and George Belliveau. 2020. Research-Based Theatre as Educational Research Innovation. In *Encyclopedia of Educational Innovation*. Edited by Michael Peters and Richard Heraud. Singapore: Springer. [CrossRef]
- Leavy, Patricia. 2009. *Methods Meets Art: Arts-Based Research Practice*. New York: The Guildford Press.
- Lecoq, Jacques. 2004. *El Cuerpo Poético. Una Pedagogía de la Creación Teatral*. Barcelona: Alba.
- Liamputtong, Pranee, and Jean Rumbold, eds. 2008. *Knowing Differently: Arts-Based and Collaborative Research Methods*. New York: Nova Science Publishers.
- Lipman, Mathew. 2001. *Pensamiento Complejo y Educación*. Madrid: Ediciones de la Torre.
- McNiff, Shaun. 2013. Introduction: A critical focus on art-based research. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health* 4: 5–12. [CrossRef]
- McNiff, Shaun. 2014. Opportunities and challenges in art-based research. *Journal of Applied Arts & Health* 3: 5–12. [CrossRef]
- McNiff, Shaun, and Phillip Speiser, eds. 2004. Discussing the Convergence of Research and the Creative Arts. *Journal of Pedagogy Pluralism and Practice* 9: Unpaginated.
- Peters, Michael, and Mark Olssen. 2011. Neoliberalism, higher education and knowledge capitalism. In *Neoliberalism and After? Education, Social Policy and the Crisis of Western Capitalism*. Edited by Michael Peters. Lausanne: Peter Lang Inc., pp. 41–74.
- Ribero, Ana Milena. 2018. Drifting across the Border. *Performance Research* 23: 102–95. [CrossRef]
- Rubin, Elihu. 2012. Catch My Drift? Situationist Dérive and Urban Pedagogy. *Radical History Review* 2012: 175–90. [CrossRef]
- Saldaña, Johnny. 2016. *Ethnotheatre: Research from Page to Stage*. London: Routledge.
- Salvatore, Joe. 2018. Ethnodrama and Ethnotheatre. In *Handbook of Arts-Based Research*. Edited by Patricia Leavy. New York: The Guildford Press, pp. 267–87.
- Santos Sánchez, Diego. 2014. *El Teatro Pánico de Fernando Arrabal*. Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer.
- Schön, Donald. 1992. *La Formación de Profesionales Reflexivos Hacia un Nuevo Diseño de la Enseñanza y el Aprendizaje en las Profesiones*. Barcelona: Paidós.
- Tolstói, Leon. 1999. *¿Qué es el arte?* Barcelona: Alba.
- Uria-Iriarte, Esther. 2018. Design, Development and Evaluation of a Program Based on Techniques of the Theatre System for the Promotion of Positive Coexistence in the Secondary Students of the Basque Country. Doctoral thesis, University of the Basque Country, Leioa, Spain.

- 
- Uria-Iriarte, Esther, and Monica Prendergast. 2021. Open Circle: Playing Coexistence in Ten Movements. *Qualitative Inquiry* 27: 265–75. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Van der Kolk, Bessel. 2020. *El cuerpo lleva la cuenta*. Barcelona: Eleftheria.
- Wadsworth Hervey, Lenore. 2000. *Artistic Inquiry in Dance/Movement Therapy*. Springfield: Charles C Thomas.
- Watzlawick, Paul. 1981. *Teoría de la Comunicación Humana: Interacciones, Patologías y Paradojas*. Barcelona: Herder Editorial.

**Disclaimer/Publisher’s Note:** The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.