

Report on Teaching

Re-performing news narratives in an ESL classroom in Japan through Living Newspapers

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ABSTRACT

The term "Living Newspaper" or *zhivaya gazeta* originated in Russia during the October Revolution of 1917. It refers to public readings of party political news for audiences in (mostly) rural locations. During the 1920s, the idea was co-opted by agit-prop¹ theatre groups across Europe and evolved into a type of proto-documentary theatre, using news and actuality to critique cases of social and political injustice. In the 1960s, the Brazilian director, Augusto Boal, revived the form as one of many techniques to experiment with theatre for social change. In 2016, as part of a course on media cultures with ESL students at Konan Women's University in Kobe, Japan, I explored the potential of Living Newspapers as a form of process drama towards critical media analysis. Students deconstructed "official" news accounts, questioned how news narratives are formed, and edited and performed their own Living Newspapers. In this paper, I outline the background of the Living Newspaper model, share the methodology for its use in an ESL classroom, and analyse its educational benefits.

KEYWORDS

Living Newspaper, documentary theatre, media literacy, news narratives, post-truth politics

実践報告

ニュース報道を再現する リビング・ニューズペーパーを使った ESL の授業例

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要旨

「リビング・ニューズペーパー」という言葉は、ロシア 10 月革命期に使われた「ジヴァヤ・ガゼッタ」に由来し、当時（大部分は）地方に住んでいた読者向けの政治的な公用紙を意味した。1920 年代に入り、ヨーロッパ全般にリビング・ニューズペーパーの手法がアジット・プロップに援用され、ニュースや実際に起きた出来事を通して社会・政治的な不正を批判するドキュメンタリー演劇の原型となった。1960 年代にブラジル人演出家であるアウグスト・ボアルがリビング・ニューズペーパーを応用し、社会変革のための劇場の手段の一つとして発展させた。こうした経緯を踏まえながら、私は 2016 年に甲南女子大学の ESL のメディア・カルチャーの授業で、メディアを批判的に分析するための手法としてリビング・ニューズペーパーの可能性を探った。本論文では、リビング・ニューズペーパーのモデルを概観したうえで、ESL の授業で使用可能なメソッドを共有し、その教育的な利点について分析する。

キーワード

リビング・ニューズペーパー、ドキュメンタリー・シアター、メディア・リテラシー、報道記事、ポスト真実

1. Introduction

In 1988, Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky published *Manufacturing Consent*, a structural analysis of the “propaganda model of [mass] communication” in the United States, which scrutinized factors such as “ownership and control [of media outlets], dependence on other major funding sources (notably, advertisers), and mutual interests and relationships between the media and those who make the news and have the power to define it and explain what it means” (p. xii). One of the conclusions that the authors drew in the book was that the “‘societal purpose’ of the media is to inculcate and defend the economic, social, and political agenda of privileged groups that dominate the domestic society and the state” (p. 298).

The spread of the Internet in the 1990s radically transformed the hierarchical media landscape that Herman and Chomsky described. While large-scale corporations continued to play a major role in shaping media discourse and still operated with vested (profit-oriented) interests, the democratization of the production of information online, and the capacity for groups to assemble and work “outside the previous [institutional] strictures that bounded their effectiveness” (Shirky, 2008, p. 24) gave the individual greater leverage in the field of media influence.

Today, the Internet as a common space for de-centred and democratic organization faces new institutional strictures. The dominance of social networks, for example, whose “walled gardens” make “the way we use the net cleaner, easier and far more controllable” (Arthur, 2012), have given rise to a new propaganda model informally known as “fake news.” This model, which came to prominence during the 2016 US presidential election, consists of the individual dissemination of false information to target audiences inside social networks on behalf of larger groups or institutions. A recent study in the *Journal of Economic Perspectives* found that “the average US adult read and remembered on the order of one or perhaps several fake news articles during the election period, with higher exposure to pro-Trump articles than pro-Clinton articles” (Allcott & Gentzcow, 2017, p. 233).

Against this backdrop of so-called “post-truth politics,” which can be defined as the “creative manipulation and invention of facts” used to produce a “narrative truth” (Keyes, 2004, p.153), I attempted to revive an early twentieth century performance propaganda model, the “Living Newspaper,” as a practical learning tool for the analysis of news media narratives in the 21st century. As part of an undergraduate course on media cultures at Konan Women's University in Kobe, Japan, students working in English as a second language (ESL) deconstructed “official” news accounts, questioned how news narratives are formed, and edited and performed their own Living Newspapers. In this paper, I outline the background and evolution of the Living Newspaper model, share my methodology for its use in an ESL classroom, and analyse its educational benefits.

2. On the origin and development of Living Newspapers

2.1 Beginnings in Soviet Russia

Living Newspapers first appeared during the October Revolution of 1917 in the form of amateur readings of news articles in public squares, factory yards, Bolshevik clubs and other worker-related sites. Known as *zhivaya gazeta* in Russian, they were part of a plethora of agit-prop techniques whose primary function was to inform (and politicize) audiences of Soviet party-political matters (Nadler, 1995, p. 615). In order to increase interest in the news readings, local committees introduced simple elements of *mise en scène* such as the use of props, costumes and placards, as well as more complex modes of delivery including group declamation, song and dance. One of the key structural developments in the form was the separation of text "between an individual and a chorus, who conversed with each other [on stage]" (Gorkachov, 1957, p. 145). Group speech not only enabled the news readers to highlight specific social problems, but it also allowed them to stage reactions too, thereby influencing spectator identification with and/or estrangement from Soviet party directives.

Living Newspapers transitioned from street to stage in 1923 through a revue/cabaret called *Blue Blouse*, an eponymous group led by Boris Yuzhanin at the Moscow Institute of Journalism. According to playwright and director, Richard Drain,

Yuzhanin refused to use professional writers [for his Living Newspapers], but practised 'lit-montage', i.e. the scripts were cutups, principally of material from papers and magazines. [...] The words ('the basic principal material') were backed with 'gesture and movement, sound and music'. Other groups started up on the same pattern, and were freely supplied with material. Eventually more than 5000 Blue Blouse groups were active, with a membership of 100,000. In 1927, Blue Blouse visited Germany, where the workers' theatre movement was already practicing similar techniques. (1995, p. 183)

Throughout the 1920s, networks such as the Workers Theatre Movement and Communist party plenums, were instrumental in spreading the Living Newspaper model worldwide. It found particular popularity in Germany and Britain, but also in the United States, China, Japan and beyond. The performances grew in length and scale and incorporated elements of film, photography and phonography, laying the foundations for what the German director, Erwin Piscator, referred to in his landmark book, *The Political Theatre* (1929), as the "documentary theatre" (p. 96).

2.2 Development in 1930s USA: The Federal Theatre Project

Living Newspapers played an influential role in 1930s North American political theatre thanks, in part, to the vision and leadership of Federal Theatre Project (FTP) director, Hallie Flanagan. Operating under the aegis of the government's New Deal Program, and with the aim of employing out of work artists nationwide, the FTP's Living Newspaper Unit brought cases of regional, national and international political injustice to the American stage. Flanagan produced a prototype Living Newspaper called *Can You Hear Their Voices?* at Vassar College in 1931. It was a play about the effects of the dust bowl on Arkansas farmers, written in collaboration with the playwright Margaret Ellen Clifford. As Barry Witham explains, "Flanagan was intrigued by what she called 'the entertainment value of fact' and [...] she was devoted to the development and production of documentary plays modeled after the pages of the morning news. Like *Can You Hear Their Voices?*, these plays would not rely on scenery or special effects, but rather on actors portraying scenes from actual events, supported by music and light" (Witham 2003, p. 78).

By the mid-1930s the productions had increased in size and political ambition, and often incurred government censorship. *Ethiopia* (1936), for example, directed by Elmer Rice and Arthur Arent, relied "almost exclusively on verbatim excerpts from political speeches of world leaders on the Italian invasion of Ethiopia [in October 1935]," including parts of an address by Franklin Roosevelt which caught the attention of the Federal Government (Favorini 1995, p. xxii). The production was never publically staged, except for a one-off open rehearsal for journalists. In a reprisal against the production, the assistant administrator for the government's Works Progress Administration, Jacob Baker, insisted that "foreign heads of state could not be depicted in a Living Newspaper" and then emended his order: "No one impersonating a ruler or Cabinet officer shall actually appear on the stage. If it is useful for you to do so, the words of such persons may be quoted by the others" (p. xxiii). This, along with other instances of government censorship, dealt a powerful blow to the FTP's political theatre activities. In 1938 the government established the House Un-American Activities Committee and launched an investigation into the FTP, accusing it of harbouring Communist sympathies and producing anti-American propaganda (Cosgrove 1989, pp. xix-xx). Flanagan went before the Committee, but her attempt to defend its practices was to no avail. In 1939, the US Congress disbanded the FTP and put an end to what was a brief but defining chapter in the evolution of the Living Newspaper.

2.3 Augusto Boal's "Newspaper Theatre" in Sao Paulo

Living Newspapers largely disappeared after the Second World War, subsumed under the

wave of documentary theatre that spread throughout Europe in the 1960s. However, in the early 1970s the form was briefly revived through the work of Augusto Boal (1931-2009) as artistic director of the Nucleus Group at the Arena Theatre of Sao Paulo. Whereas early Living Newspapers in Soviet Russia had been devised as propaganda tools by the Proletcult¹ to support the Communist worker movement, Boal transformed the model – in the context of Emilio Medici's military dictatorship in Brazil – into a set of applied theatre exercises for the group analysis and critique of biased news media discourses.

In his seminal book, *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Boal provided a list of exercises that formed his Newspaper Theatre model², giving insight into its potential for staging radical re-readings of news narratives. The exercises can be roughly divided into three modes of action: reading, improvisation and decontextualization. Exercises in the reading mode are designed to distance the reader from news narratives by subverting the conventions of everyday newspaper readings. This involves strategies such as "crossed reading," where two different stories are read in contrasting form in order to unlock new understandings of each article; "complementary reading," in which performers insert missing or redacted information into a story; and "rhythmical reading," which is reading a story to the rhythm of a particular musical style (samba, tango, Gregorian chant etc.) "so that the rhythm functions as a critical 'filter' of the news, revealing its true content, which is obscured in the newspaper" (2008, p. 121).

Exercises in the improvisation mode accentuate the performer's interpretive agency in the news reading. This includes miming parallel actions while a news story is being read in order to create a visual frame of reference that complements and/or contrasts the narrative, and recreating a news story as a means of exploring variation and subtext in the story. The decontextualisation exercises displace the logic that underpins conventional news narratives by (re)inscribing information, ideas and voices that are often cut in the editorial process. This includes activities such as adding historical data to a story from similar events that occurred at different historic and geographic moments in order to question the repetitive cycle of news narratives; finding ways to turn abstract information in news stories – such as torture, hunger and unemployment – into graphic images on stage; and presenting the news out of the context in which it was originally published: “an actor gives the speech about austerity previously delivered by the Minister of Economics while he devours an enormous dinner: the real truth behind the minister’s words becomes demystified – he wants austerity for the people but not for himself” (p. 122).

Together, these exercises function as a type of meta commentary on news narratives, enabling the participant, who alternates between reader and listener roles (active and passive), to distance herself from the normalizing tendency of news media cycles. As an experiment in the collaborative

construction of documents, Boal's Newspaper Theatre bears similarities with an earlier initiative by German playwright, Bertolt Brecht. This is no coincidence given that Boal owed a great deal of his own thinking on the social and political function of theatre during the Arena Theatre era (1956-1971) to Brecht's writings, particularly the relationship between theatre and society through the frame of dialectical materialism: "we [Arena Theatre members] were more interested in showing real things (borrowing terms from Brecht) than in revealing how things really are" (p. 145).

Brecht's "Fatzter Fragment" is an apt example of this genealogical lineage. Between 1926 and 1930, Brecht worked on an epic 500-page document that he referred to as the "Fatzterdokument". Contained within the material were fragments of a play about a group of four WWI German army deserters who wait in hiding for a revolution that never takes place. The group leader, Johann Fatzter, commits acts of unpardonable egotism against his fellow deserters, ultimately forcing the group to execute him. According to Judith Wilke, the project's purposefully incomplete and fragmented state was a response to "the popularity of documentary drama and literature in the 1920s" (1999, p. 122) – particularly the work of Brecht's erstwhile friend and collaborator, Piscator. In her analysis of an essay by Brecht titled, *Kleiner Rat, Dokumente Anzufertige (Brief Advice on Producing Documents)*, Wilke writes that whereas Piscator placed his trust in the veracity of documents (films, reports and photographs) to stage reality, Brecht saw the document as an "artifact that would become 'authentic' only by provoking conflicting interpretations" (p. 123). She explains Brecht's notion of the "artifact" in the following terms:

Through his paradoxical demand to make up documents, Brecht subverts the idea of an unquestionable authenticity of documents in general. And as an artifact the document meets the requirements of an 'immediate usability.' This particular combination of an increased relevance to a present situation and an unlimited validity for the future demands the viewpoint of a chronicler and a poet, who produces the 'document' as a utopian model of history. (p. 124)

In re-conceptualizing the document as a borderless entity whose validity is constructed through collaborative creation in the here and now, Brecht opens the document up as a site of performance, and in doing so, questions its traditional position as arch-symbol of juridical authority and archival realism. For Brecht, the document is never final, it is invariably "fake" and obtains validation (in the theatre) through the collective construction, commentary and critique of its content. Brecht's position is indicative of the intellectual appetite in interwar Europe for challenges to traditional (bourgeois) forms of authority and power. It is interesting to note however, that after WWII, the relationship

between documents, archives and truth claims in the theatre saw a strong return to the juridical/evidentiary function of the document, particularly in works that dealt with the Holocaust³.

Boal drew inspiration from Brecht's dialectical approach to the construction of documents in his Newspaper Theatre, placing emphasis on the process of document creation rather than relying on its finished state. Reflecting on his political theatre practice in Latin America in the 1970s, Boal made the following observation about audience approaches to open ended performance structures:

Popular audiences are interested in experimenting, in rehearsing, and they abhor the 'closed' spectacles. In those cases, they try to enter into a dialogue with the actors, to interrupt the action, to ask for explanations without waiting politely for the end of the play. Contrary to the bourgeois code of manners, the people's code allows and encourages the spectator to ask questions, to dialogue, to participate. (Boal ctd. in Montfort & Noah Wardrip-Fruin, 346)

Boal's work in applied theatre gained a strong following in education circles and by the late 1990s, it had become part of core curricula for secondary and tertiary sector drama courses in countries worldwide.

2.4 Living Newspapers in the digital age: Collar and TIE

One of the most recent examples of experimentation with the Living Newspaper model was developed by the UK-based Collar and TIE (C&T) group. C&T began in 1988 as a theatre in education (TIE) company using the workshop-based approaches of Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton in schools and other community spaces (Shaughnessy, 2012, p. 161). Based at the University of Worcester, and led by artistic director Paul Sutton, the company is now known for its approach to TIE using digital technologies. This shift, as the company's website explains, was prompted by "the Local Education Authority shake-ups of the '90s and young peoples' affinity for an emerging digital society" (C&T website). One of the key influences in the company's development, as Nicola Shaughnessy points out, was the digital game-based learning approaches pioneered by Marc Prensky and others: "Prensky's advocacy of games-based approaches and forms which draw upon the neural and social networks of digital natives is evident in C&T's methodologies" (2012, p.164).

C&T's decision to experiment with Living Newspapers was partly inspired by the resurgence of documentary theatre in the UK during the late 90s and new millennium, and partly a desire to revisit the legacy of the Federal Theatre Project through current technological means. Sutton explains

the company's approach to Living Newspapers in the following way:

The company has shaped various iterations of the Federal Theatre Project's Living Newspaper, graduating from performances using live video and digital projections, through elaborate CD-ROMs that re-shaped documentary drama techniques giving them a contemporary edge and resonance. [Through the Living Newspaper model] Young people could take their own documentary digital content and then author their own sequences of images, videos and personal testimony shaped as hard hitting multi-media presentations. (2012, p. 604)

What differentiates C&T's Living Newspaper model from the other examples mentioned thus far is the educational environment in which it was deployed. In the classroom, the role of the educator is split between facilitating a nuanced critique of the Living Newspaper as a form of political performance and helping students exploit its framework to critique the subject matter they have chosen to stage. C&T's answer to this ethical challenge was to inscribe self-reflexivity into the dramaturgy of their educational material. As Shaughnessy notes, students in participating schools had access to a CD-ROM that contained instructions on how to create their Living Newspapers, as well as access to characters (performed by C&T company actors) in an online newsroom whose staged dialogues and interactions provided a layer of meta-commentary on the process of making media narratives (2012, p. 207). While the act of re-performing the news already implies a measure of distance between the news narrative and its audience, C&T exploited the self-reflexive potential of Living Newspapers by bringing the digital/technological frame that produces mediation into focus.

After more than a century of development, from the streets of Soviet Russia to classrooms in the UK, practitioners have gradually come to view the Living Newspaper less as a model of political theatre and more as a set of applied theatre tools to interrogate the ideological function of mediation in performance cultures. This shift is partly a consequence of the form's structural basis, which from the outset was open to experimentation and transformation, and partly a response to the ongoing academic critique – in fields such as Media, Film and Performance Studies – of truth claims enacted in the name of the institution.

3. Adapting Living Newspapers to an ESL course in a university in Japan

3.1 Course rationale and structure

As part of a 2016 spring-summer semester course on English language media cultures at Konan Women's University in Kobe, Japan, I adapted the Living Newspaper model for ESL students. Among the 30 participants, student levels of English ranged from pre-intermediate (CEFR level A2) to upper-intermediate (CEFR level B2). The premise of the course was to use the Living Newspaper as a springboard for group-led investigations into the way contemporary news media outlets construct their narratives. Through the creation of devised plays, students were invited to think about the editorial process, particularly with regard to the representation of real stories, but also to the ideological influence that news narratives have on their audiences.

Drawing on the historical legacies of the Living Newspaper form outlined above, with an emphasis on the applied theatre techniques of Augusto Boal (Newspaper Theatre and Image Theatre⁴), I conceived a fifteen-week practical course that brought the function of English language news media in the 21st century into critical focus through practice-led research. The course contained three core learning aims: the development of media literacy skills, English language acquisition, and experimentation with the Living Newspaper theatre form, including documentary research, script writing, editing, acting and addressing problems of representation.

I divided the semester into two seven-week blocks and one final debriefing session. The first block consisted of a series of workshops on the history of Living Newspapers, in which students explored the key points outlined in section two above. Emphasis was placed on comparing approaches to the construction and socio-political effects of Living Newspaper models. Time was also set aside for learning new vocabulary and expressions and for group discussion of biased news reporting. The main purpose of this first block was to develop the "scaffolding" that would enable students to take a more autonomous and critical approach to devising their own Living Newspapers in the second block.

Classes in the second block were split in two parts: teacher-led work on drama techniques and student-led work on the Living Newspapers. Given that each class was limited to ninety minutes, groups were also assigned extra-curricular research activities related to their chosen news stories. The decision to introduce simple drama exercises during this phase of the course was important since the majority of students had little to no experience of drama. Drama and theatre studies, particularly practice-based work, is generally not part of secondary education in Japan. Even at the higher education level, drama is still perceived as a literary subject; and despite recent developments in the field, as evidenced in the writings by contributors to the *International Association of Performing Language Journal*, for example, most practical work still takes the form of extra-curricular, student-led drama clubs and societies.

3.2 Classroom conditions

Just as theatre spaces shape the outcome of performance practice, classroom spaces shape the outcome of creative learning. The Living Newspaper activity works best in an open classroom space with movable desks and chairs. It is important to be able to switch quickly between "editorial" modes of working, such as sharing research material, discussing editorial decisions or drafting a script, and "performative" modes of working, such as developing characters through physical expression, experimenting with space, or dealing with problems of *mise en scène*.

At the same time, this old division between theory and practice, or "thinking" and "doing," should be approached with caution. Much of the learning potential in drama in education comes from the open-ended structure of devised theatre. This includes, problem solving as a group; risk taking and experimentation with creative ideas; as well as giving and receiving peer criticism. Left to their own devices, students with little experience of drama often opt for the familiarity and orderliness of the desk over the foreignness and uncertainty of the open space.

Enabling fluid transitions between traditional learning structures and drama based education activities was not only a matter of classroom management in this project, but was also a challenge in the "dramaturgy" of each group's performance. A pattern emerged early on in the group devising cycle, whereby students would place more emphasis on "planning" their performances instead of "embodying" them. Therefore, a significant part of my role as facilitator was to suggest ways of working outside the conventional structure of the Japanese university classroom. This meant debasing the hierarchical classroom model in which the student "absorbs" the "wisdom" of the teacher. Suggestions included exploring rehearsal spaces outside the classroom, experimenting with the news material in non-written and non-verbal forms through Boal's Image Theatre exercises (this is outlined in further detail below), and working collaboratively through trial and error.

4. Methodology

The following section outlines the core activities undertaken in the final seven-week block of the semester. The aim is to give the reader an understanding of the activities in the hope that they may serve as a useful resource for further adaptation and critique. Each class contained a mixture of theatre games (TG), image theatre exercises (IT) and Living Newspaper (LN) work.

The theatre games consisted of simple exercises in dramatic self-expression designed to encourage students to work with the body as a medium of expression. As source material, I adapted exercises from Clive Barker's *Theatre Games* (1988), Alan Duff and Alan Maley's *Drama Techniques* (2005), and Jessica Swale's *Drama Games for Classrooms and Workshops* (2009). The image theatre

activities were taken from Boal's applied theatre textbooks, *Theatre of the Oppressed* (1979) and *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992), but also from London-based theatre for development company, PAN Intercultural Arts' *Theatre for Development Handbook* (2010).

Led by John Martin, PAN is one of the UK's foremost theatre for development groups and has a long history of international development work in post-conflict settings using theatre for individual and community rehabilitation. While PAN draws on the legacy of Boal's work, particularly Image Theatre and Forum Theatre, over the years, the company has crafted its own distinctive methodology, which is outlined in their handbook. I used elements of Image Theatre from Boal and PAN as a toolkit to help students physicalize the contents of their living newspaper research. One of the most challenging aspects of this Living Newspaper activity is finding ways to embody written material. Image Theatre techniques help facilitate this transition thanks to the simplicity of their design.

The Living Newspaper activities were inspired by and adapted from the various practices outlined in the opening section of this paper. Finally, I have also included an indication of time allocated for each activity.

Week 8: Establishing physical presence

TG - Ball and name game (5 mins):

Using the entire space, participants throw a sponge ball to anyone whose name they know. When they throw the ball, they call out the person's name. This game helps create a group bond, frees up inhibitions and is a good way to learn names.

TG - Walking in space (10 mins)

Using the entire space, participants practice different styles of walking, such as walking alone; walking and greeting; walking and making eye contact; walking while averting the gaze and so on. This helps develop awareness of bodies in the performance space, encourages simple modes of self-expression and helps build confidence to "perform" in front of peers. Participants tend to repeat patterns and copy each other, so it can be useful to reinforce the idea of self-time, self-space and self-expression.

TG - Stop-go game (5 mins)

The facilitator gives simple commands to the participants as they walk around the space: stop, go, jump, hop etc. After a while, s/he reverses the commands so that stop means go and go means

stop. This game helps participants to focus their listening ability and bodily awareness in space. Once the rules have been established, the facilitator can hand over the commands to one of the participants. A good variant is to set up two groups and two student facilitators, increasing the difficulty of spatial and auditory awareness.

IT - Lost at sea (15 mins)

In groups of five or six, the facilitator explains that each group is on a boat at sea on a calm, sunny day. Using only physical expression (no discussion), participants are invited to create a boat. Three students might form the hull, while one might create the sails and two might be the passengers.

Once the boats are formed, the facilitator announces a change in weather, such as the approach of a small breeze. Students are asked to physicalize the effect of the breeze as a group. The facilitator next announces the approach of a storm. This time, the students not only physicalize the effect, but add sound effects too. The final stage is a tsunami warning. Students are told that a wave will arrive in twenty seconds. The facilitator gives a count down until impact.

The purpose of this exercise is to build physical expressivity as well as group trust. The students must work together to create a plausible image of a boat at sea.

IT - Family photos (20 mins)

Using the same groups from the "lost at sea" exercise, students now imagine themselves as a family. Each group member chooses a family role: grandmother, grandfather, mother, father, daughter, son-in-law, and so on. The facilitator then gives the groups a scenario: a wedding photo; a family picnic in a park; the grandfather's funeral photo; the daughter's job promotion etc. Without discussion, the group must arrange the "photo" and "record it" (memorize it). For each photo, a different member of the group plays the double role of photographer and family member. The photographer steps out of the image and makes adjustments to the group through touch. S/he can move group members around, change bodily poses and facial expressions until s/he is satisfied that the image expresses the truth of the scenario to the best of the group's ability.

Once all the scenarios have been played out, the group is invited to make an "album", which means showcasing all the photos in sequence with simple transitions. The facilitator then asks the groups to present their "albums" to the entire class. As an additional task, at the end of each album, the audience can try to guess who is who in the family.

The purpose of this exercise is to physicalize relationships between people through simple still images. It also establishes the notion of an "outside eye" in the form of the "photographer". This

is helpful later on in the devising stage to carry out peer criticism.

LN - Making groups (5 mins)

In order to avoid the problem of cliques, which can often hinder risk-taking and experimentation, the facilitator can either assign the Living Newspaper groups or set up a quick random order game to let chance decide. For example, students form a circle in order of date of birth. The facilitator then starts at "January 1st" and counts groups of four or five.

LN - Selecting stories (30 mins)

The facilitator can bring a selection of print newspapers and/or give a list of online English language newspapers (if computers or tablets are available). Each student in the group is asked to peruse the papers in search of a story of interest.

While students are free to choose any story they want, it helps to establish some basic selection criteria since not all stories lend themselves to Living Newspaper material. A report of a football match, for example, tends not to have enough critical depth for a meaningful analysis. The facilitator can choose the criteria or it can be the object of a group discussion. In my case, I suggested that articles should contain at least one event, one place, one protagonist and one problem. Students were asked to bring their chosen stories to the next class and to be prepared to explain the story to their groups.

Week 9: Re-telling stories

TG - Becoming animal (10 mins)

Using the whole space, students are invited to physicalize the "essence" of an animal such as a domestic cat, a lion, a crow, a dolphin and so on. The students work individually at first to establish the animal's core movements. What does it feel like to walk like a cat? How does a cat look at other cats? What does the cat do? It eats, washes and sleeps; sometimes it pounces on a mouse or a bird. It is always alert, always on guard. Once the students have enough physical vocabulary to work with, they can intermingle and encounter each other as cats.

This exercise can be quite difficult for students with limited drama experience. It is easier if the facilitator proceeds in steps, starting with walking, looking, sleeping, eating, washing, pouncing and finishing with interaction. An interesting culmination of this exercise is to introduce a select number of predators into a group of prey. For example, five students could be lions and the rest could

be crows. The exercise encourages students to embody abstract movements and shifts the frame of performance away from cliché imitations of reality, towards a more truthful, personalized form of expression.

TG - Morning rituals (20 mins)

Using the whole room, students walk around the room, aware of each other's movements and personal spaces. The facilitator taps one student on the shoulder and at a certain point claps his/her hands and the group must stop where they are. The chosen student must tell the story of her journey to campus that morning – of what she saw along the way, of what she did and how she felt – moving in and out of the "frozen" audience and trying to engage each one as she passes by. Once her story begins to falter, and/or she stops engaging with the audience, the facilitator claps again and the group continues walking. Another student is chosen and another story told.

This exercise is useful for establishing a sense of presence on stage. Since it can be daunting for some students to speak in front of their peers, it is useful for the facilitator to be the first speaker and for a student to take the role of the facilitator, deciding when to stop and start the action. In my case, I split the activity into two rounds. In the first round, I asked students to tell their stories in Japanese. This helped them to take ownership of the game structure. In the second round, they were given a few minutes to prepare simplified versions of their initial stories in English.

LN - Re-telling stories (20 mins)

Returning to the Living Newspaper groups, students told the stories they chose in week 8. Students were encouraged to do this activity in English using the simple "five Ws" approach to structure the retelling: who is the story about? Where does it take place? When does it take place? What happens? Why do you think it is interesting?

After each retelling, group members can ask the storyteller to clarify any part of the story that is unclear. The final task is for the group to choose the story that they will use as the basis for their Living Newspaper. This can be done through a simple show of hands. Students in my class were encouraged to choose stories that had enough critical depth to warrant further research and examination.

IT/LN - Translating stories into images (50 mins)

Once the groups had chosen their stories, each group was asked to break the story into a series of "scenes". Each "scene" consisted of an event (an action that occurs in the story), a place (setting) in

which the event occurs, and people (characters) involved in the event. Most groups had at least three scenes to work with at this stage. Some groups added further scenes in weeks 10 and 11 based on cross-readings of their story in other newspapers.

Students were then asked to create still images for each of their scenes, in the same way that they constructed "family photos" in week 8. Again, each group performed their "album" of images to the entire class. This time, the audience was asked to guess what each group's story was about, where it took place and who the characters might be.

The next stage in this image theatre work was to add simple elements of movement and speech to each scene. Students could use quotes from the newspaper articles as the source of the speech, or create their own speech while trying to maintain the tenor and content of the original article. At this stage, I found it important to monitor the balance between discussion and action. Some groups tended to revert back to talking about the scene rather than embodying it. When this happened, I re-introduced the "outside eye" role, encouraging one group member to step out and observe the scenes and then try making changes. This observer/director role should be shared in the group.

The final step in this activity was for each group to find a simple physical transition between scenes and then run the sequence several times over – each time with an outside observer suggesting changes. The groups then performed their scenes to the rest of the class. At the end of this session, each student was asked to read two different newspaper versions of their chosen story and to bring notes on any differences or supplementary information they found to the next class.

Week 10: Editorial problems

LN - Cross-reading (30 mins)

We began this session with group feedback on the homework assignment, which was for each student to read different accounts of their chosen stories from different newspapers. Each student reported her findings back to the group, pointing out differences with the original chosen text. All findings were noted on a large piece of paper at the centre of each group.

The next step was to discuss each noted difference and collectively decide whether to incorporate it into the existing scenes from week 9 or to discard it. When students found conflicting accounts of the story, they were asked to determine which account was factually accurate, either by cross-referencing other articles, or if there was lack of evidence, to conduct further research using in-class computers and to try and corroborate the point. Students were encouraged to think about the implications of including and excluding information on the overall credibility of the story and on how

it would affect the story's reception.

IT - Re-performing images (30 mins)

Armed with new information, and in many cases, with new scenes, students revisited the images, speech and movement they devised in week 9 and worked on extending the sequence. As facilitator, I observed each group and gave feedback on changes that had been made.

LN - First draft (20 mins)

The final task of the session was to draft a rough English language script based on the scenes they had developed so far. This included stage directions that described the setting of each scene and character movement, as well as each character's speech.

Week 11 - Staging the text

TG/LN - Moving in character (25 mins)

Each group was asked to assign each member with a character based on the rough drafts of their scripts from week 10. Next, using the whole space, students were asked to find the basic characteristics of his/her gait. Does the character move quickly or slowly? With determination or uncertainty? With power or weakness? With deference or arrogance?

The next step was to experiment with speech. Students were asked to consider how their character might speak. Does he/she have a loud voice, talk quickly, have a stutter, or speak with a particular accent? Walking and talking as their chosen characters, the students introduced themselves to other characters in the class. They exchanged simple information about their age, their place of birth, and their individual stories.

On the one hand, this activity helped validate character choices that had been in development since week 9, and on the other hand it was an opportunity for the group to acknowledge the range of stories under construction, exposing peculiarity and difference as key drivers of the project.

LN - Developing scenes (30 mins)

Students ran their scene sequences from weeks 9 and 10. At the end of the run-through, each group was invited to self-assess any problems or incongruities in the scene. I provided a check sheet with questions that encouraged students to think about whether their scenes conveyed the story properly; whether there were any narrative gaps; whether the angle of the story telling was true to the

original news article and their cross-readings or whether bias had begun to creep in; and what they could do to improve the storytelling in terms of speech and physical expression. Based on this discussion, each group was asked to make amendments and additions to their scripts.

LN - Simple staging techniques (35 mins)

I divided the room into four sections: lighting, sound, set and costume. Each section contained some simple portable equipment related to each element of staging. In the lighting section, were floor spotlights, desk lights, torches and a data projector connected to a laptop. In the sound section was an audio recorder, a portable stereo, a smartphone connected to speakers and some percussion instruments. The set section contained some chairs, wood blocks, cardboard, paper and drawing equipment. The costume section included some basic items of clothing such as hats, scarves, and jackets.

The groups were given a section and invited to explore with the equipment for 5 minutes, thinking about potential uses for their Living Newspapers. After rotating round each section, the groups convened for a fifteen-minute brainstorming session sharing any ideas they had come up with while exploring the equipment. These ideas were noted on a group paper and were carried over to week 12.

Weeks 12-13: rehearsals

Having established the basic elements of performance, weeks 12 and 13 were devoted to group rehearsals. The main performance space was a squared off section of the classroom. The five groups rotated on a roster system to enable equitable access to the space. Adjacent classrooms were used as "break out" spaces to allow groups to continue the rehearsal process outside the main space.

As the facilitator, my role at this stage was to liaise with each group and offer critical feedback on their Living Newspapers. Much of my input at this point revolved around problems of narrative incoherence, physical expression and use of space. I also provided checklists to maintain a simple element of structure in the work and keep the groups moving forwards. At the end of week 13, the class convened for a pre-performance plenary session to address any outstanding technical issues and to decide the order of the performances in week 14.

Weeks 14-15: Performances, assessment and project debrief

The students performed their Living Newspapers. The titles of the five group performances were as follows: "Women banned from owning mobile phones in India"; "Light and dark"; "State

Secrets Law"; "Food Safety without Borders"; "A Hundred Still Missing." On average, the performances lasted between 5 and 10 minutes, with time allocated to each group pre-performance for preparation, and post-performance for critical assessment.

Students were given grading sheets to peer-assess performances based on the following criteria:

- Research: to what extent did the group present a story demonstrating detail and nuance?
- Editing: to what extent did the group maintain a balanced approach in re-telling their story?
- Embodiment: to what extent was the group able to physicalize their story in a compelling way?
- English language: to what extent was the group able to convey their story in understandable English?
- Staging: to what extent did the group's choices of *mise en scène* enrich their performance?

Grades were attributed to each criterion on an AA to D scale (AA: 90-100%; A: 80-90%; B: 70-80%; C: 60-70%; D:50-60%), and each group's final grade was an aggregate of student and teacher scores across the five criteria. The overall aim of the assessment was to provide qualitative feedback on how well each group had met the project's learning goals.

A secondary layer of assessment was conducted in the form of written self-appraisals that were submitted in the final week. The appraisals provided valuable insight into individual contributions to the project. Among the questions asked were the following:

- What was the topic of your story and why did you choose it?
- Do you think your original news article told the story in a balanced and accurate way?
- What personal contributions to the project did you make?
- What challenges did your group face in this project and how (if at all) did you overcome them?
- Do you think your performance was successful? What could you do to improve it?

In the final session (week 15), I distributed my own feedback on each group performance and shared the peer assessment results with the class. Following that, we held a plenary session in which students were invited to talk about specific challenges they had encountered, memorable moments in the project, and ways of improving the course for the future.

5: Two performance examples

This section provides a brief overview of performance feedback by two of the student groups. It includes an introduction to each group's story and a selection of reflective criticism, reproduced verbatim from student self-appraisals. By including this material, the intention is to give the reader insight into the project's impact from a student perspective.

5.1 Example 1: “Women banned from owning mobile phones in India”

In this piece, the students began with an article in *The Telegraph* newspaper, titled “Indian village bans girls from using mobile phones in flirting crackdown.” It was the story of unmarried women in the village of Sure, Gujarat, who were banned from using mobile phones by the village elders for fear that “flirtatious texting and endless phone calls could lead to a breakdown of society” (Marszal, 2016).

The students researched the story across different newspapers, including English language newspapers in India, and found disparities among the different versions, particularly with regard to the motives of the ban. *The Hindustan Times*, for example, emphasized the correlation between the phone ban and a previous ban on male alcoholism in the village. That part of the story was absent in *The Telegraph* and *The Guardian* coverage.

What was the topic of your story and why did you choose it?

- We were interested in the situation in India, because we can't imagine that in Japan and we can't even spend time without our phones these days. I also thought I can find from the story its gender discrimination and real problems in developing countries.
- Japan doesn't have strict laws like this village in India, so I was interested in how do we think about Indian women.
- We felt the story was interesting because the women who were banned cell phones are exactly same age with us. Therefore we decided to act this story.

What challenges did your group face in this project and how (if at all) did you overcome them?

- First, I had to read many articles to find the truth. The contents of newspaper and articles were different between reporters. It was hard at first, but I enjoyed a lot because I could know the problem of information. Second, I was a newscaster in our play, so I watched some news such as BBC on YouTube to see how they talk.

- I played a reporter. I was committed to speaking to all the audience in a large voice. I practiced pronunciation at home. I enjoyed the acting.
- We challenged to act independently, we divided parts one by one. This style makes it more clear understand by audience. Then we made a script. Each member made a part. I think this style is good way for a performance.

Do you think your performance was successful? What could you do to improve it?

- I believe it was good, but we could improve more. We didn't have time to practice together and I couldn't find how to play the Indian girl.
- Our performance was successful, but to improve it, we should enjoy acting more. I was very nervous. I practiced more and more by myself. It led to the self-confidence. Other members had strong pronunciation and looked stately. So I wanted to be like them. This class was very fun.

5.2 Example 2: "Light and Dark"

In this piece, the students began by working on a newspaper article about the relationship between diets and mental health in the United States. Their initial idea was to focus on the problem of obesity. However, they found it difficult to relate to the American case, so they decided to interview their peers on dietary habits in Japan. Although this approach shifted the group's focus away from the core news reading activity, it enabled the students to gain greater insight into the interview/editorial process. The group discovered that the majority of interviewees in their sample consumed dietary supplement pills to counteract the intake of junk foods such as potato chips and candy bars. Using a simple "light" and "dark" lighting design, they tried to describe the positive and negative aspects of student diets, using contrasting opinions from medical experts in newspapers to support their claims.

What was the topic of your story and why did you choose it?

- My group performed "Light and Dark" which means the danger of young women's too strict diet. We compared with other students and found out some bad habits they share. Many of us worry about our look and we tend to go on diets, so this was interesting for us.
- I wanted to tell everyone about the danger of bad diets. I was glad if the audience could think about diet problems from our performance.
- I read the newspaper story about teenagers and extreme diets like using supplements, cigarettes and drugs. I was interested in this topic. I wanted to know about other students diets.

What challenges did your group face in this project and how (if at all) did you overcome them?

- We wanted to use projector for spotlight, but at first it didn't work well, especially color and size. So we practiced many times after school and we could finally make the right light. I thought about the important of practice.

- We separated our work; reading articles, doing interviews, making script, making some gadgets. I thought it was good way because we could balance our work. We tried to make a unique and original style. We came up with many ideas.

- Actually, I reduced eating snacks and junk food by this performance! I'm busy because I work, go to university, play trumpet and don't exercise. So I changed my habit.

Do you think your performance was successful? What could you do to improve it?

- I think our performance was a success! Because with all bodies, we expressed, and used many things. We wanted to tell everyone about dangerous diet. We learnt a lot about diets, therefore this performance was good chance.

- It was success. I used a lot of props, music, light, power point, costume and so on. I tried to show our theme's reality. I think I could perform well.

- Our performance was success. It was quite effective that create dark or light atmosphere with light. I think it was good that [my group mate] ate real snacks and salad. The audience had reaction. That was great. We practiced after school and I enjoyed doing practice. The performance was more fun that I imagine it.

6. Conclusion: on the educational benefits and problems of Living Newspapers

Drawing on ideas and techniques from practices in the history of Living Newspapers and applied theatre, this ESL project explored the re-performance of news stories as a tool for developing media literacy skills in a "post-truth" era. The overall positive impact of the project, as demonstrated by the student feedback, resulted from its mix of editorial and performance-led activities, undertaken in a fluid classroom space, in which individual and group voices were given equal emphasis.

Reflecting on the learning aims and outcomes of the project, I was able to identify five core educational benefits. Firstly, the group readings of multiple versions of a news story was an important step towards understanding reporting bias and misinformation. This skill was further developed in the editorial and performance phases of the project, through tasks such as establishing selection criteria for media materials and experimenting with different modes of representation. Secondly, and as corollary of this, the acts of reading, editing, writing and performing texts in English played an

important role in student language acquisition. One of the difficulties in this strand of learning was finding a balance between a teacher-led and student-centred pedagogical structure. The seminar format of the first seven-week block of the semester was more conducive to quantitative learning tasks, such as studying vocabulary lists, completing reading comprehension exercises and applying newly acquired language patterns in group discussion activities. The second seven-week block drew on this momentum, but adopted a more qualitative approach to language learning, through the holistic structure of the Living Newspaper process.

Thirdly, the exercises taken from and/or inspired by Boal's Image Theatre were crucial for building individual and group confidence in physical expression. The simple structure of the character building exercises, gave the students a degree of autonomy in their devising work and enabled them to take risks and experiment with the material. The process of embodying the voices that students collected as part of their news material led to a newfound respect for the people and their stories, but also for the importance of fair and unbiased representation.

Fourthly, I found that student motivation was generally quite high as was the spirit of collaboration and mutual respect. This was especially important when students faced inevitable difficulties with language, but also with problems of *mise en scène*, line-learning and acting. Part of the reason for this motivation can be attributed to the simple structure of the Living Newspaper model. The ability to grasp the limits of that model early on, empowered students with little-to-no experience in drama work to push its boundaries and exploit its potential.

While the project's outcomes were overwhelmingly positive, there are a number of critical points that should be acknowledged. One immediate issue was the lack of time for the development of acting skills. The theatre games and Image Theatre exercises that I taught during the second block of the semester worked well as building blocks for simple physical expression, but fell short of becoming truly usable acting skills. As a result, several of the student works were static and tended to use the classroom's built-in teacher stage as the main performance space. In retrospect, I would have allocated time in the first seven-week block to simple acting work.

This point relates to the structure of the course. In section 3.1 above, I outlined the course rationale and drew caution to the theory/practice dichotomy in devised theatre work. However, it will be evident to the reader that this division is in fact part of the regulating structure of the course. The course was split between seminars on the history and ideas behind the Living Newspaper form and practical workshops that explored the form through devised performance. During the planning phase of the course, I considered merging elements of history and performance into a ten-week block, leaving five weeks for groups to create their Living Newspapers. In that configuration, classes would

have begun *in medias res* using practical work as the basis for the exploration of history and theory. I chose the seven/seven split as a compromise because it seemed too demanding to expect students with little to no experience of drama work to start making performances from the outset. However, given that the very premise of applied theatre is to repurpose performance structures for socially engaged work with actors and non-actors outside of commercial theatre structures, in hindsight this reservation seems unfounded.

Finally, this paper has tried to reflect on the production and usage of "documents" in the context of "post-truth" politics through drama in education. At a time when the representation of truth is under political attack, particularly in the digital media sphere, the document – be it a newspaper article, photograph, tweet, YouTube video, radio broadcast or other – risks becoming what Jean Baudrillard famously called a "simulacrum." That is, it can be seen to "bear no relation to any reality whatever; it is its own pure simulacrum" (Baudrillard ctd. in Favorini 1995, pxxi). The Living Newspaper as a practical performance model for media discourse analysis inhabits part of this "hyperreal" space. However, in my view, by maintaining an emphasis on embodied experience and by re-mediating stories by people whose voices have become part of the "currency" of the hyperreal, it is still possible to have meaningful critical purchase on what constitutes truth and why it is still worth fighting for.

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¹ Diminutive term for the Proletarian Cultural and Educational Organisation. For an in-depth account of the rise and fall of the Proletcult in Soviet Russia, see Mally (1990).

² For the full list of Boal's newspaper theatre activities, see *Theatre of the Oppressed*, 2008, pp. 121-22.

³ See Yasco Horsman's discussion of "dramas of judgment," a term he uses to refer primarily to the trial of Adolf Eichmann and its account by Hannah Arendt in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, but also to the series of Holocaust-related documentary plays that appeared in 1960s Germany: "*Der Stellvertreter* [by Rolf Hochhuth] was to become the first in a series of documentary plays written by young German playwrights, such as Peter Weiss and Heinar Kipphardt, who sought precisely to transform the theater into a site of learning" (2011, p.26).

⁴ Image Theatre is the umbrella term used by Boal to describe a methodology for devised performances with actors and non-actors in pursuit of community-oriented, interactive plays, called "Forum Theatre." For a detailed account of this methodology, see *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (1992), pp. 2-6 and pp. 164-201.